Table of Contents

1. Chapter Guide
2. Info about BlazeClan
3. A/N
4. Prologue: Exile
5. Allegiances (BlazeClan)
6. Chapter 1: New Life Stage
7. Chapter 2: Slate and Stone
8. Chapter 3: Petal Markings
9. Chapter 4: Unfair Punishment
10. Chapter 5: Prickly Answers
11. Chapter 6: Drifting Melodies
12. Chapter 7: Oh, Who Is He..?
13. Chapter 8: Whispers From The Past
14. Chapter 9: Consumed In Water
15. Chapter 10: Secrets Hidden
16. Chapter 11: Trust Issues
17. Chapter 12: Curse Or Enchantment
18. Chapter 13: Hurt and Comfort
19. Chapter 14: Over The Edge
20. Chapter 15: Old Memories
21. Chapter 16: Hidden Truth
22. Chapter 17: Trust In Me
23. Chapter 18: Deep Down Under
24. Chapter 19: Rocky Rumble
25. Chapter 20: Bitter Goodbye
26. Epilogue
27. Trivia
28. Character Showcase
29. A/N

Chapter Guide

Prologue: Exile
Info About BlazeClan
BlazeClan Allegiances
Chapter 1: New Life Stage
Chapter 2: Slate And Stone
Chapter 3: Petal Markings
Chapter 4: Unfair Punishment
Chapter 5: Prickly Answers
Chapter 6: Drifting Melodies
Chapter 7: Oh, Who Is He..?
Chapter 8: Whispers From The Past
Chapter 9: Consumed In Water
Chapter 10: Secrets Hidden
Chapter 11: Trust Issues
Chapter 12: Curse Or Enchantment
Chapter 13: Hurt And Comfort
Chapter 14: Over The Edge
Chapter 15: Old Memories
Chapter 16: Hidden Truth
Chapter 17: Trust In Me
Chapter 18: Deep Down Under
Chapter 19: Rocky Rumble
Chapter 20: Bitter Goodbye
Epilogue
Trivia
Character Showcase

Info about BlazeClan

Leader (King)
Highest rank, reserved for toms only. The Leader eats first, addresses the clan, and is to be respected in every way. He dishes out punishments to those who commit treason or do something disrespectful. He and his children are to be well treated, and he changes mates whenever he feels like it.

Deputy
Second In Command and the next leader, also only reserved for toms. They assign patrols and spot hunting and training sessions for trainee Claws. They become leader after the current one dies. They also act as the leader's royal advisor.

Royal Heirs
These cats, regardless of gender, are to be made respectable Claws by their father. They cannot be medicine cats as that role is only for non-royal she-cats and royal she-cats cannot be Shines unless they desire a mate or unless their father does not wish to allow them to become a warrior.
They are to be respected and their word is law like their father's unless said otherwise.
When their father dies, the oldest male heir can challenge the deputy to fight for the Leader position. If there are only she-cat heirs, then a vote is held for a new leader and the she-cat will ***temporarily*** lead the clan.
If a non-royal tom is chosen as the Leader, the she-cat heir will be his mate.

Claws
Reserved only for toms. These cats are the muscle of the clan. They hunt and fight, and have the authority to order around she-cats if they desire. They are allowed to switch mates as much as they want because she-cats are deemed weak and unworthy of respect.
A trainee Claw is called a Titanpaw.

Shines
Reserved only for she-cats. To-be Shines are chosen at kit age for how beautiful they are. Their job is to simply be beautiful for the toms and sing their praises and bear their children until they can no longer do so, then they will be thrown to Prickle status. Shines are also not allowed to name their kits; only their Claws can.
A trainee Shine is called a Starpaw.

Nettles
She-cats deemed not pretty enough by the parents and the Leader are to be Nettles, aka medicine cats. It is considered the lowest rank as medicine cats are, to the clan, the ones who chose a life of cowardice even if the she-cat desires to be a Claw. As I said, the toms are sexist as heck and think their opinions are superior to the she-cats'.
A trainee Nettle is called a Littlepaw.

Prickles
These are she-cats who are disabled, disfigured or cannot bear kits any longer, and to the clan they are known as the Crown Spirits Disgrace. They are tortured and constantly mocked by the Claws and the Shines and Nettles can do nothing to help them.

Code of the Blazing Star

1. Royals and Generals must be well-treated and obeyed.

2. She-cats are expected to bear at least 2 litters of kits, otherwise they will be thrown to Prickle status.

3. Claws are NOT allowed to mate with a Starpaw unless there is a lack of Shines.

4. The Royal Heirs, deputy and Leader's word is law.

5. She-cats are not allowed to speak ill of their mates, leave camp alone, take on new mates while they still have another or name

their kits. If any of these rules are broken they will be thrown to Prickle status or killed.

6. No she-cat is to be part of the Council of the Blazing Star.

7. Toms can call the she-cats whatever they please but she-cats must call toms Sir or General.

8. She-cats must obey what their mates say.

9. Nettles and Littlepaws are to be held at lowest regard in the clan because they lead a life of cowardice over glory.

10. Royal heirs that are female can only lead the clan temporarily until the clan has voted for a new male leader. They can also be disobeyed if their father either disowns them or commands the clan to.

11. Leader, his heirs, deputy and his highest ranked General eats first, Elders and Claws second, Titanpaws third, Starpaws and Shines fourth, and the Nettles and Littlepaws are lucky if they get anything to eat at all. Prickles are given scraps.

12. If the first mate of a Shine dies, she is not allowed to choose another one.

13. Titanpaws are allowed to 'reserve' a Starpaw as their mate until they become older and can claim them.

14. Any act of disrespect towards the royals or generals is punishable by various ways.

15. Nettles cannot have any kits at all. If a Nettle is found to have kits, adoptive or blood-born, the kits will be taken away/killed and the she-cat will be killed.

A/N

Here's how you tell who is from which clan/tribe later in the series. BlazeClan cats have the regular warrior cat names, like *Beetlescar* and *Cougarstar,* all that, whilst the tribal cats have names like Morning Glory and Jagged Stripe.

To tell the difference between the cats of the Golden Rose Cult, Hearts Of The Restless and Wings of Freedom and trainees from the tribe apart (*since they both don't have suffixes*), I will put a note at the bottom of each chapter indicating who is who should you get mixed up.

Example:
Cult cats are: Freckle, Hawk, Tyto
Tribe cats are: Split, Light, Rain

That is all!

———————————

Edit (27/10/24)
Ignore everything said here lmao go to my guide book for info

Prologue: Exile

The moon shone high in the sky, bathing the forest below in its soft, pale glow. The eerie moonlight illuminated the darkened paths, turning the rocky grounds silver.

An owl or two hooted loudly in the distance, and moths fluttered around any light source they could find.

A white and grey tomcat sat on the stone wall that guarded the house outside the forest, waiting for his mate. It was a chilly night, one full of night breeze and the irritating sound of cicadas chirping here and there.

Soon, a pale sandy-coloured molly with faint silver stripes with a lavender- coloured collar around her neck emerged from the Roadwalker den, with two tiny bundles gently clutched between her teeth.

Their kits.

The tom felt pride course through his veins at the sight of his sandy-furred son and his grey and white pelted daughter.

The female DenFolk pet reached her mate, and carefully dropped the kits onto the ground, earning small squeaks of protest from both of them as they hit the cold ground.

"*Cedar*." The DenFolk pet's voice calling him by his nickname caught his attention and he then gazed up at her. "*Yes, my love?"*

" Where are we going to go? I don't want our children to be taken away by my HomeWalkers. Could they possibly...live with you in your Clan?"

The silvery tomcat shook his head, sighing. "*I'm afraid not, my love, Cougarblaze had me exiled because he was afraid I'd be picked as deputy instead of him."*

The DenFolk pet blinked in both shock and disbelief. "*Surely*

Squirrelstar isn't that stupid to believe him?"

"He does, mainly because he twisted the story to make me look guilty. The best we can do now is leave." The DenFolk pet sighed and brushed her nose against his feather-soft fur, allowing the exiled tom's heart to act like spooked sparrows.

"*Where can we even go?"* She questioned. Her partner sighed. *"The only place I can think of going to right now is the valleys over the mountains. If we seek refuge anywhere else in here Cougarblaze will surely seek us out and kill us."*

He turned to his mate, half expecting her to decline going to the valleys. He was pleasantly surprised when she smiled wearily and replied, "*I'll do anything to keep my precious ones safe.*"

He smiled warmly at the love of his life before bending down to pick up the sandy pelted tomcat, who let out a squeak when he did so.

His mate picked up their daughter, who made nary a silver of sound as she did, and the duo set off towards the teetering mountains that seemed to puncture the horizon and pierce the sky.

Allegiances (BlazeClan)

BlazeClan

Leader
Cougarstar- A muscular, golden brown tomcat with tufted ears, a long tail and dark green eyes.
Current Mate: Lilacheart
_____

Royal Heirs
Lichenfrost- A gold-brown she-cat with curled ears, green eyes and a white chest heart.
Beetlescar- A dark chocolate brown tom with tufted ears, a short tail and green-yellow eyes.
_____

Deputy
Azuregale- A sleek silver tom with white stripes and a white underbelly and blue eyes.
_____

Claws
Thornslash- Russet tom with a white belly, chest and tail, tufted ears and green eyes . He is the highest ranking warrior and is to be addressed as General by lower ranking cats like the Nettles and Shines. He has a son Depthpaw.

Crowcall- A black spotted tabby tom with short fur and amber eyes.

Nightscar- A black furred tom with ebony stripes and yellow eyes.
Titanpaw: Depthpaw

Beechwhisker- Cream mackerel tabby tom with nicked ears and blue eyes.
Titanpaw: Slatepaw

Stormslash- Brown ticked "pseudo tabby" tom with copper eyes and white ears.
Titanpaw: Stonepaw

Firstone- Red spotted "pseudo tabby" tom with hazel eyes and white paws.

Gustfang- Slightly smaller sized grey tabby with darker stripes, green eyes and a white chest and underbelly.

Tigersnap- Apricot mackerel "pseudo-tabby" tom with dark green eyes.

Thrushpounce- A dark grey tabby with black and paler grey striped splotches and a white blaze on his forehead, green-blue eyes, tufted ears and protruding fangs.
Titanpaw: Cootpaw

Weaseltail- A rust-coloured Abyssinian tomcat with nicked ears, pale dusky amber eyes and a black tail tip.

Hornetsting- Brown furred tomcat with medium white spotting, short ears and green eyes.

Cragshade- A red ticked "pseudo tabby" tom with short fur and copper eyes.
Titanpaw: Lionpaw

Stoatsnarl- Cream and brown tom with tufted ears, a long tail and amber eyes.

Pinethorn- A white and dark grey tom with a massive nick in his left ear and brilliant blue eyes.

Cobrastrike- A dusky brown tomcat with sandy golden stripes and one green eye and one blue eye.

Stagpounce- Black mackerel tabby tom with short fur and yellow eyes.

Bearclaw- Red classic "pseudo-tabby" tom with short fur and gold eyes.

Talonsnarl- Blue classic tabby tom with long fur and hazel eyes.

Foxfang- Sparse haired red and black mackerel calico tom with

green eyes.

Sootear- Caramel tom with short fur and green-gold eyes.
Titanpaw: Rockpaw

Snakebelly- White furred tom with cream and blue spotted calico-tabby tail and ears and yellow eyes.

Shines
Sunshimmer- Blue and cream classic tortoiseshell-tabby she-cat with blue and green eyes.
Claw: Firstone
Starpaw: Streampaw

Floralstreak- Short-furred lilac and cream spotted tortoiseshell-tabby she-cat with blue eyes.
Claw: Nightscar

Petalwhisper- Red mackerel "pseudo tabby" she-cat with short fur and blue eyes.
Claw: Thornslash
Kits: Depthpaw

Featherbreeze- Cream spotted "pseudo-tabby" she-cat with pale yellow eyes and curled ears.
Claw: Stoatsnarl

Starlingspirit- Blue spotted tabby she-cat with sparse fur and amber eyes.
Claw: Gustfang
Kits: Rockpaw, Slatepaw, Stonepaw

Vervainwhisker- Fawn she-cat with a white chest, belly and paws, tufted ears and gold eyes.
Claw: Weaseltail

Chanterellestreak- Blue and cream mackerel calico she-cat with short fur and blue eyes.
Starpaw: Softpaw

Sagethroat- Short-furred white she-cat with black and red spotted

calico-tabby tail and ears and green eyes.
Starpaw: Hazelpaw
Claw: Cragshade

Lilynose- Caramel and apricot mackerel calico she-cat with short fur and amber eyes.
Starpaw: Cinderpaw
Claw: Thrushpounce

Lilacheart- Blue and cream tortoiseshell she-cat with white paws and pale green eyes.

Minkstripe- Cinnamon and red classic calico she-cat with curled ears and green eyes.
Starpaw: Honeypaw

Fawnspeckle- Fawn spotted tabby she-cat with long fur and amber eyes.

Rosewater- Long haired lilac and cream mackerel and tortoiseshell she-cat with green eyes.
Claw: Stagpounce

Tansytail- Cinnamon and red mackerel tortoiseshell she-cat with pale green eyes.
Claw: Snakebelly

Nettles
Stempetal- Ginger and white tabby with green eyes and tufted ears.

Elmriver- A black and red spotted tortoiseshell-tabby she-cat with amber eyes.

Berrytrail- Short furred black she-cat with small ears and yellow eyes.

Vinespring- Pale brown tabby with darker brown stripes, white paws and green-blue eyes.

Aldertrail- Deep brown she-cat with wavy fur, white streaks and green eyes.

Dawnheart- White she-cat with ginger and cream splotches and copper eyes

Willowflutter- Long furred blue mackerel tabby she-cat with green-yellow eyes.

Lotusheart- White and cream she-cat with curled ears, a short tail and gold eyes.

Titanpaws

Depthpaw- Russet tomcat with a white underbelly, curled ears and copper eyes. Son of Thornslash and the most respected out of the Titanpaws.

Lionpaw- Golden mackerel tabby tom with green eyes and a sturdy build.

Slatepaw- Grey tom with darker stripes and blue eyes. The second oldest of his litter and is extremely close to his younger brother Stonepaw. His parents are Gustfang and Starlingspirit.

Stonepaw- A brown-grey tom with darker stripes, a short tail and gold-yellow eyes. The youngest of his litter and is very close to his older brother Slatepaw. His parents are Gustfang and Starlingspirit.

Cootpaw- A cream ticked tabby tomcat with white ears, paws and tail and green eyes.

Rockpaw- A blue-grey tom with darker stripes and green eyes. The oldest of his litter and a huge bully to his younger brothers Slatepaw and Stonepaw. His parents are Gustfang and Starlingspirit.

Starpaws

Honeypaw- Golden she-cat with darker swirls, blue eyes and a white underbelly and chest.

Streampaw- Silvery she-cat with dark grey stripes and green eyes.

Cinderpaw- Lilac and cream spotted tortoiseshell she-cat with copper eyes.

Hazelpaw- Cream and white mackerel she-cat with a short tail and

hazel eyes.

Softpaw- Mostly white, black and red mackerel tabby-calico she-cat with soft, short fur and gold eyes.

Littlepaws
None at the moment.

Queens
Dovetail- A white and cream she-cat with amber eyes and a long tail.
Kits: Goslingkit **(brown and cream she-cat)** and Swankit **(white she-cat)**
Claw: A brown and white mackerel tabby tom with amber eyes who was renamed Blazeclaw, his real name is unknown. **(Deceased)**

Cottonsong- A fully white she-cat with wavy fur, a long tail and curled ears.
Kits: Expecting
Claw: Stormslash

Prickles
A skinny sandy pelted she-cat with amber eyes and tufted ears. **(Rabbithum)**

A grey she-cat with rosettes, blue eyes and a badly torn ear. **(Cloudflower)**

A pale brown tom with darker patterns, tufted ears, a short tail and green eyes, about the age of a newly-made Claw. **(Hazepaw)**

A brown striped tabby with green eyes and multiple scars on her pelt. **(Chervilsky)**

A white furred calico with unique orange eyes and a scar on her shoulder. **(Poppystreak)**

Chapter 1: New Life Stage

"*I'm going to become the best Shine in the entire history of BlazeClan!"*
"I'm sure you will, sweetie!"

Goslingkit scowled as her mother, Dovetail, began grooming her sister Swankit, all the while showering her with both praises and compliments on her 'unique beauty'.

The brown and cream furred she-cat glared enviously at her sister, who went on bragging about how she'd be so beautiful all the toms would ask to be her mate when she became a full-on Shine.

Goslingkit curled her lip and began grooming her own pelt; that's what she's been doing since young since her mother obviously didn't care enough.

Since young, Dovetail has shown little to no interest in Goslingkit at all, choosing to instead pamper her other daughter Swankit due to the belief that she would be the most beautiful cat in the whole entire clan with her snowy white pelt and round amber eyes.

Almost the whole clan believed she was an angel; that was her devil's disguise.

Whenever she did something bad, Swankit would put on an innocent face and point at Goslingkit so she could take the blame.

Goslingkit was pretty much the 'ugly duckling' of the two, and since her sister was already her mother's world, she was left with nobody.

Well, almost nobody.

"*Hello, young Goslingkit."* The she-cat glanced up in surprise to see the BlazeClan second-in-command, Commander Azuregale, standing over her with a warm smile.

Azuregale had always helped nurture her, teaching her the code and showing her the love her mother failed to give, which was

surprising for a tom in BlazeClan due to their usually questionable opinions on she-cats.

Having lost his mate and kit to a Roadwalker's metal beast, he saw the need to show Goslingkit the love of a father as hers had died during the Season of Frost due to a mysterious disease shortly after she and Swankit were born.

Since then the duo had become inseparable, and Azuregale always treated Goslingkit like his true daughter.

That didn't mean she didn't show him respect all the other clan cats had to give, though.

Carefully reciting the words in her head, Goslingkit placed both paws before her and bowed her head down before mewing, "*Greetings, Commander Azuregale of BlazeClan.*"

Azuregale gave an amused purr and gestured Goslingkit over with his long, silvery tail. The she-kit did so, and immediately Azuregale began to gently groom her.

"*Commander Azuregale, I can groom myself!*" She protested. The silvery tomcat paused for a moment and chuckled. *"You looked like a porcupine, little one, that's why I decided to step in."* Goslingkit felt her ears burn with embarrassment and ducked her head.

"On that note, you're becoming an apprentice today. How do you feel?" Azuregale paused his grooming and gazed at the kit, his amber eyes curious. "*Unhappy.*"

"*Why so?"* Goslingkit sighed and answered, "*Because I can't be a warrior due to the code and I can't be a Shine because Cougarstar and Dovetail think I'm too ugly. Being a medic sounds so boring!*"

Azuregale gave the kit a look and asked gently, "*Is it also because of the prophecy?*"

Goslingkit remembered that earlier that moon, a Nettle named Berrytrail received a prophecy from the Crown Spirits saying, "A beautiful avian of grace will soar above the peaks, following the songs of glory to complete what the lost star did not."

Immediately every cat assumed that the 'beautiful avian' was referring to Swankit, thus they just treated her like she was Cougarstar's child.

Bitterly, she nodded to Azuregale and he smiled sadly. "*Little one, you are special the way you are. The clan is just blind to see that.*"

Azuregale suddenly turned his head and wrinkled his nose at something, Goslingkit following his line of view as he added softly, "*And at least you're not an annoying attention-seeking tramp like your sister."*

Swankit was strutting around camp, waving her tail boldly at the male apprentices.

Most looked on with lust while a few of them seemed blatantly disgusted as she swung her tail around, pointing at them and later at her rear end.

Azuregale pretended he was puking, much to the amusement of Goslingkit who giggled softly. "*All cats of BlazeClan! Gather beneath the Sunrock for the morning announcements!"*

Azuregale gave Goslingkit a gentle nudge as he stood up and quickly brought her over to the rest of the crowd, placing her in front of the Sunrock before he hurried into his position beside the Leader's Perch.

Moments later, Swankit strutted over, giving her sister a look of disdain and sat a distance away from her. Not like Goslingkit minded, though.

Cougarstar finally stepped out onto the Perch, his golden-brown fur gleaming under the radiant sunshine.

His gold-brown tail whisked around wildly, and his green eyes scanned the Clan, and in his deep voice, he meowed, "*Today, I am making two cats apprentices, and two cats warriors. My darling children, please step up."*

Goslingkit saw Azuregale roll his eyes discreetly as Cougarstar's children, Lichenpaw and Beetlepaw, puffed up their chests and

walked forward.

The two 'royal' siblings were a royal nuisance to the clan. They were spoiled and had the authority to command others to do things they didn't want to do with just a threat to tell their father.

"*My dearest heirs, do you swear to uphold the Crown Spirits' Code till the day the stars call for you?"* Cougarstar asked, gazing proudly at his two children.

"We do!" The duo exclaimed in sync. "*Then from this day on, you will be known as Lichenfrost and Beetlescar, for your bravery and courage."*

Goslingkit almost snorted at the words. What bravery and courage?

When the clan began chanting the royals' new names, she tried to as softly as possible, before she noticed Azuregale was not even chanting their names at all.

"*Now, I will be making two more cats apprentices, one a Starpaw and the other...a Littlepaw."* Goslingkit scowled. She knew the Littlepaw was her.

"*Swankit, step up.*" Goslingkit watched as her sister pridefully bounced forward.

" The almighty Crown Spirits have spoken. From this day on, Swan paw will become a trainee Starpaw of BlazeClan under the watch of the Crown Spirit Aurorasong. It is seen in the Stars that Floralstreak is the best match for her, may they train well on the path to everlasting beauty together."

A pretty she-cat with silky cream and brown fur stepped forward, blue eyes gleaming with excitement. They touched noses, and while the clan was cheering, stepped back. Now it was her turn.

Goslingkit slowly stepped forward, refusing to meet the Leader's eyes. Cougarstar gave a sneer and meowed, "*The almighty Crown Spirits have spoken. From this day on, Goslingpaw will become a trainee Littlepaw of BlazeClan under the watch of the Crown Spirit Yarrowbloom."*

" It is seen in the Stars that Aldertrail is the best match for her, may they train well together, and hopefully learn to be more respectful and polite ."

Goslingpaw felt anger boil under her pelt. She'd give the mangy Leader the amount of respect he deserved, mainly NONE at all.

The laughter that rippled out through the toms in the clan caused her to unsheathe her claws and dig them into the soil.

Still, she forced herself to step forward and touch noses with her new mentor who was a she-cat with rich brown fur shot through with streaks of white.

Her glossy fur started with dark hazel brown and was covered with beautiful intricate streaks of moon-white, and Goslingpaw noticed the area near her underbelly had about three bald patches here and there.

"I promise I'll try to be a good mentor to you," Aldertrail whispered. Goslingpaw gazed back into her green eyes and whispered back, "*Thank you, I'll be the best apprentice I can be.*" She meant it.

Cheers rung out mostly from the she-cats except for her mother and sister, and much to Goslingpaw's surprise, two of the Titanpaws, Slatepaw and Stonepaw, chanted her new name too.

Her heart warmed when she saw Azuregale cheering for her, his eyes flashing with pride.

"If there is nothing else to add, Clan dismissed," Cougarstar mewed, leaping off the rock and sauntering back into his den.

Immediately, a lot of the cats in the clan surrounded Lichenthorn, Beetlescar and Swanpaw, congratulating them while only the few cats who cheered for Goslingpaw came over to congratulate her.

"*Good job, Gos! Now you're an apprentice like us!*" Slatepaw cheered, his amber eyes sparkling with joy.

He and Stonepaw had surprisingly been friends with Goslingpaw since they were young, and the Slate and Stone duo had been

apprenticed half a moon early to Beechwhisker and Stormslash.

Goslingpaw grinned and headbutted her friends, earning small shrieks of laughter and chuckles from the adult cats watching.

She turned her head and caught her sister's eye. Swanpaw just scoffed and looked away, and her mother blatantly turned her head.

Goslingpaw felt a sense of sadness curling in her belly. Wasn't Dovetail at least proud of her? At least Azuregale, Stonepaw and Slatepaw cared for her.

As Azuregale shooed away most of the cats so Goslingpaw could start her training, he and Aldertrail walked alongside her to the Nettlecave. As she was about to enter though, she heard something.

It sounded like a song, an ancient melody. Goslingpaw twitched her ears and looked around. Nobody else in the clan seemed to hear it.

The haunting notes of the song sent a shiver down her spine and a hypnotic tingle through her body; she could barely decipher what it was singing though.

The melody was hypnotic, drawing her to look in the music's direction, hoping to-

"*Goslingpaw?*" She snapped out of the trance as Azuregale and Aldertrail gave her funny looks. "*Come in, I'm going to show you the basic herbs used for healing."*

Goslingpaw nodded apologetically and quickly followed her mentor in after a quick goodbye to Azuregale, but the mysterious notes of the strange song stayed stuck at the back of her head.

Why was she the only one who seemed to hear it? What were the mysterious voices? Goslingpaw's thoughts ran amok, wondering about the song.

No matter how hard she tried, she couldn't shake off the feeling that maybe, just maybe...

The song was calling out to her.

Chapter 2: Slate and Stone

"*What is this herb, Goslingpaw?"* The cream and brown apprentice scrunched up her muzzle in concentration and thought for a moment before uttering, "*T-Thyme?"*

Aldertrail nodded and smiled. "*What does it do?" "It..uh..calms a cat down?"* Goslingpaw answered, voice quavering with uncertainty.

"*You're a fast learner, little gosling. I'm very impressed. Now, what is this herb called?"* Her mentor gingerly used a paw to pick up a bunch of small leaves.

Goslingpaw stared hard at it before mewing, "*Nettle leaves, they're used to treat swelling."* Aldertrail smiled warmly and nodded. She placed the herb back on the storage shelf and purred, "*Very good, Goslingpaw."*

Goslingpaw forced a smile. She wanted to be out of the Nettlecave so badly! The pungent smell of all the herbs filled her nostrils and made her a bit dizzy.

Her mentor seemed to know what she was thinking and mewed, *"You can go out for some fresh air for a moment. Come back afterwards, I'm going to show you the more poisonous herbs."*

The she-cat nodded in excitement and quickly pelted out of the cave. She breathed in deeply, relishing the fresh air. Her peace was soon interrupted when one of the other Starpaws, Honeypaw, stalked past and shoved her rudely.

She stumbled slightly but quickly regained her footing, making eye contact with the golden-furred Starpaw before her who stared at her in disdain, eyes narrowed and lip curled in disgust.

"*Oops, didn't see you there, goosebrain,"* she sneered, gazing at her scornfully with eyes like the midnight sky, her soft golden fur spiking up as if she was trying to assert dominance.

Goslingpaw chose to ignore the comment as Azuregale had taught her to hold her tongue unless it was important. She stayed silent, hoping the lack of reaction would bore Honeypaw and send her away.

Honeypaw seemed to take her lack of reaction as a chance to jab at her again, however, and scoffed, "*Fine, act like you don't hear me. You're just an ugly goose, wayyyyy too ugly to be a Shine like me. I'll bet you'll fail at being a Nettle too, since you're so stupid."*

Goslingpaw wanted to laugh at the insult. She didn't care about being a Starpaw, and she already knew Honeypaw had less than five braincells due to most of her head probably made of air.

She simply strode off, trying to hold in her laughter as Honeypaw, shocked that she'd ignored her 'hurtful' insult, spluttered, "*H-Hey! Don't ignore me! Come back here, I'm not done with you yet!"*

Suddenly, a different voice called out, "*Gos! Over here!"* She turned her head to see Slatepaw and Stonepaw sharing tongues nearby, their blue and yellow eyes gazing at her.

Slatepaw gestured for her to come over, and she gladly obliged, smiling with satisfaction as she heard Honeypaw having a hissy fit behind her.

Slatepaw and Stonepaw were two of the more sensible toms in the clan. They'd defended Goslingpaw since young from the other toms and some of the boastful, airheaded she-cats and had become friends with her as well.

Goslingpaw settled down beside her friends and Stonepaw grinned before saying, "*You really showed Honeypaw who's boss! Especially since she's one of the most spoiled and bratty cats in the clan, seeing her face was hilarious!"*

Goslingpaw grinned and answered, "*Well duh! She needs constant compliments to inflate her ego just to make up for her lack of a functioning brain!"* The three apprentices shared a laugh at the comment.

"So, how's training as a Littlepaw going?" Slatepaw asked. "*It's a little boring, but Aldertrail's going to show me some poisonous herbs later! How about you?"*

Stonepaw grimaced and tucked his head into his fluffy tail in a show of embarrassment and frustration. Slatepaw sighed at this and Goslingpaw braced herself for his answer.

" Not going well. Stormslash left halfway to mate with one of the Shines, I think she's called Minkstripe, and I caught them in the old badger set. He warned me not to say a word or I'd be forced to become a Littlepaw."

Goslingpaw gaped at her friend in disbelief. *"Doesn't he have a mate already? Cottonsong? She's pregnant, right?"*

The brown Titanpaw sighed, drawing a paw over his ear. "*You know how twisted Cougarstar's mind is. The full-grown Claws can do whatever they want here, the she-cats' opinions don't matter."*

Goslingpaw nodded in agreement and turned to Slatepaw. "*How about you, Slate?"*

Slatepaw shook out his silver and white fur and let out a loud groan. "*I swear to the Crown Spirits, if another Starpaw approaches me AGAIN, I'm going to lose it! They clearly don't know what 'I don't care how you look like' means!"*

Stonepaw laughed hysterically, curling his brown tail around his paws before he turned to Goslingpaw. "*Your sister tried approaching him for whatever Shine practice and wouldn't stop nuzzling him! It was hilarious!*"

Goslingpaw snickered as the silvery tomcat swatted Stonepaw over the head.

"*It's not funny! She only stopped when I threatened to tell Cougarstar and even then she was still so confident because she's the self-proclaimed 'cat of the prophecy'. Like I care!"*

Goslingpaw felt a prickle of unease as she remembered the time the prophecy was brought up, that was when her mother decided right there and then Swanpaw mattered more than Goslingpaw ever

would.

Stonepaw gave him a swat over the head and Slatepaw immediately covered his mouth with a paw, baby blue eyes wide in alarm. "*I'm so sorry, I didn't mean to strike a nerve!"*

She cracked a weak smile and sighed, "*It's okay, really. I've got Azuregale and you guys, that's enough for me."*

The toms smiled awkwardly before they heard Aldertrail call, "*Goslingpaw! Come here!"*

The cream and brown she-cat replied, "*Coming!"* And bade good bye to the two Titanpaws before streaking back to the Nettlecave.

Chapter 3: Petal Markings

Goslingpaw treaded over to the prey pile, her belly growling with hunger. The whole morning, Aldertrail had showed her all the herbs to use for treating patients and she'd give the young apprentice a tour of the territory later to see the best herb locations.

She snatched up a squirrel and quickly carried it over to the Fallen Log to eat. Settling down comfortably, she was about to take a bite of the plump critter when suddenly, a russet paw snatched it away.

"*Hey-!"* She glanced up to see Beetlescar and Lichenfrost towering over her, smug smirks on their faces. *"Oops, sorry, kit, but this squirrel is ours now,"* sneered Lichenfrost as she sauntered off with her brother, the plump squirrel hanging from his jaws.

Goslingpaw gritted her teeth with anger and got to her paws, hurtling after them. She wanted to eat something that would actually fill her belly for once, not a puny mouse or a scraggly crow!

She halted in front of them and shouted, "*Give me back my squirrel!"* The royal twins looked at each other and burst out laughing.

"*Look at that, the tiny midget trying to stand up for herself!"* Beetlescar leaned closer and snarled, "*Pathetic she-cat, you dare to yell at us, Cougarstar's children? Have you no shame?"*

Goslingpaw was having a hard time trying not to tell Beetlescar his breath stank of dung.

Many eyes were in them now; Goslingpaw knew she was no match for the two royal pains; they were like thrice her size! But she knew something had to be done. The squirrel had been hers; she took it first! She was supposed to be able to eat it without this kind of problem!

She wasn't surprised to see many cats staring at her with pity and

alarm as well. It was no big surprise that not many clan cats, tom or she-cat, liked the royal siblings as well; they could do whatever they liked and whenever they wanted.

Most of the Claws watched with interest, intrigued to see what would happen next. The Nettles and the Shines watched with horror.

The Titanpaws were whispering smugly to each other, and Goslingpaw heard one of them, Lionpaw, say, "*That stupid Littlepaw is too weak to do anything!"*

The Starpaws had mixed reactions, some horrified and fearful while others were smug. Slatepaw and Stonepaw crouched together near the Nettlecave, eyes wide with fear.

Goslingpaw felt anger crash like tidal waves in her belly when she saw her sister Swanpaw and their mother Dovetail smirking smugly at her, silently challenging her to fight back and embarrass herself.

"*Time to put my vocal cords to good use,"* Goslingpaw thought as she flattened her ears, pinned her tail to her body and took a deep breath.

She had strangely been gifted with rather powerful vocal abilities and sharp hearing since young, and was able to raise her voice to alarming levels with no issue.

No cat was able to ever explain why.

She wasn't sure if what she'd do would work, but it was worth a try. Beetlescar rolled his eyes while Lichenfrost snickered upon witnessing this and said, "*What, are you gonna cry or throw a tantrum, little cry-kit Littlepa-"*

The two were completely taken aback when Goslingpaw suddenly screamed at the top of her lungs, "*I SAID GIVE ME THE SQUIRREL BACK! I TOOK IT FIRST, NOT YOU!"*

Almost every cat within hearing range immediately covered their ears or buried their heads into their paws as her shrill voice echoed through camp.

Lichenfrost covered her ears in alarm and Beetlescar jumped. Goslingpaw glared at them, her sides heaving in and out. She suddenly felt a strange burning sensation on her throat, but dismissed it as a strain on her vocal chords.

"My ears!" Groaned Lichenfrost, wincing in agony. Her brother, unfortunately, seemed more livid than alarmed at her scream. *"You little punk! You dare to yell at us and command us?!"*

He raised a paw, claws unsheathed and glittering under the sun. Goslingpaw stood her ground, but her legs shook slightly in fear.

A shadow was cast over them all of a sudden, and the three cats turned to see Azuregale standing over them, his eyes glinting with malice.

"Commander Azuregale!" Goslingpaw hurriedly bowed to her foster father, while the royal twins reluctantly dipped their heads.

"Correct me if I'm wrong, Crown Heirs Lichenfrost and Beetlescar," Azuregale snarled, saying their names like they were a bad taste in his mouth. "*But didn't the two of you say the other day that prey is first come, first served? I saw that Goslingpaw took the squirrel first, did she not?*"

Goslingpaw then remembered that the two russet furred twins had gotten into a spat with two Claws over prey, and they'd loudly declared that prey was first come first served as they'd been at the prey pile before the Claws.

Lichenfrost spluttered, trying to come up with an excuse while Beetlescar stared at Azuregale in disbelief.

The silver furred deputy had a photographic memory and clearly remembered every event that happened before.

"*W-well, we're the royal heirs of BlazeClan! She's just a lowly Littlepaw, and she dared to challenge us!*" Beetlescar protested.

Azuregale narrowed his eyes. *"I'm sure you'd do the same if another cat stole prey from you, correct?*" The twins scowled and glared at Goslingpaw before throwing the squirrel down and stomping away.

The rest of the clan returned back to their regular conversations and Azuregale gently used his tail to guide his foster daughter away after he picked up the fresh kill.

"*My dear gosling, are you okay?"* The clan deputy asked once he dropped the squirrel. Goslingpaw shuffled her paws nervously and nodded. Was she going to get in trouble?

Azuregale lifted her chin up with a claw, covering her smaller form with his bigger silver tail and looked at her, before meowing, "*You are a brave cat, Goslingpaw. But maybe try not to pursue such a small matter."*

The Littlepaw's fur bristled. "*It's not a small matter! I took the prey first!"*

Azuregale stared at her sternly and answered, "*There is enough prey for you to choose from in the pile. There's no need to make a huge fuss over a mere squirrel."*

Goslingpaw fell silent and sighed. The pattering of paws suddenly filled the air as Slatepaw and Stonepaw suddenly stampeded over. "*Gos! You okay?!"* They asked in unison.

Azuregale snorted in amusement and Goslingpaw felt her ear tips burn with embarrassment. "*I'm fine..."* she mumbled. The two Titanpaws sighed in relief, but their eyes soon widened again in confusion.

"Um...Gos?" "What?" "Since when did you have petals under your eyes?"

Goslingpaw*'s* eyes widened and felt her face with a paw. Azuregale immediately moved her head so he could have a glance too, and immediately his eyes went wide as well.

"*What happened?! What do you mean by petals under my eyes?!"* Goslingpaw demanded shakily.

Stonepaw gestured to a puddle of water nearby and she slowly treaded there, dreading to know what her foster father and her friends had seen.

Upon reaching the puddle, she peered curiously into it, and gasped in a mixture of shock and disbelief when she saw her reflection.

Under her eyes were markings like flower petals that were white as snow, and next to her eyes were five sparkling white dots that glinted like twin suns.

Chapter 4: Unfair Punishment

"*Hm, that's unlike anything I've ever seen,*" Aldertrail murmured as she gingerly examined her Littlepaw's face. "*Will she be okay?!*" Azuregale demanded, lashing his tail in worry.

"*The markings under her eyes seem to have no effect on her, but the one on her throat...*" The Nettle paused for a moment before saying, "*I think it has a burning sensation on her throat should she strain her voice too much.*"

Goslingpaw nodded mutely; her throat hurt a bit after the outburst.

Azuregale was about to say something when Cougarstar's voice suddenly roared, "*Every cat in BlazeClan, gather beneath the Sunrock to hear my words!*"

Goslingpaw groaned. She knew this was coming, but really, it was still so humiliating! Her first day as a Littlepaw, and she was already in trouble.

Aldertrail gently nudged her forward and murmured, "*Good luck,*" before quietly shuffling to the back where all the Nettles sat.

Goslingpaw felt shame as many pairs of eyes stared at her, judging her. She also started hearing whispers behind her back.

"*Isn't that the only Littlepaw in the clan?*"

"It is! Suppose she's in trouble for shouting at the royals?"

"Of course she is; those royal brats get anyone that stands up to them in more trouble than a cat biting a tiger's tail!"

"You have to admit though, she was brave for standing up to them."

"Too right, not even the boldest Claw dares to speak back to the royal nuisances!"

"For a Littlepaw, she's got more guts than all the Titanpaws in this clan, daring to yell at the royal heirs like that!"

Goslingpaw felt pride when she heard some respect in those whispers, but that feeling quickly vanished when Cougarstar stepped onto the Sunrock, his children beside him grinning smugly.

Azuregale's eyes were full of worry as he locked gazes with the young Littlepaw when he took his spot next to the Leader's Perch.

"BlazeClan, right now I have gathered you all here to publicly announce the punishment for this disgusting, deceptive, manipulative excuse for a she-cat," Cougarstar snarled, eyes blazing with fury.

Goslingpaw met his gaze evenly, her own green eyes glaring furiously back at his. She wanted to flare up her neck fur to try and appear bigger, but something told her not to.

"*My own children, the royal heirs themselves, honourable and true, have said that this little liar, this pathetic waste and scum of the Earth molly-"*

Goslingpaw stifled an angered growl at this comment.

"*Has rudely and wrongly accused them of stealing prey, and DARES to challenge them even when she is in the wrong!"*

Goslingpaw wanted to scream that it wasn't true, but before she could try, Cougarstar continued in a booming growl, "*She has also manipulated our deputy, the honest and steadfast Azuregale, into taking her side!"*

Goslingpaw shot a glance at her foster father, whose eyes were filled with exhaustion and anger.

She knew he hadn't told Cougarstar that he'd chosen to take her side; the Leader would believe his own children over his deputy in a heartbeat.

Anger flared up inside Goslingpaw. She had been wrongly accused!

She immediately stood up, facing the Leader and yelled back, "*Your children are the deceptive liars! They're big and nasty and rude and*

deserve to go eat a heap of badger dung!"

Gasps of shock came from the cats watching, as they never expected a she-cat, a *Littlepaw* no less, to insult the royal children like that.

Lichenfrost and Beetlescar were both astonished, their jaws hung agape and their eyes looked like they would pop out of their sockets.

Cougarstar's expression was a mixture of fury and shock. He narrowed his eyes in an unmistakable rage and roared at the top of his lungs, "*Unbelievable! The cheek of you to say that! Your first day as a stupid Littlepaw and you dare to insult your superiors!"*

His tail lashed angrily and his claws shot out of their sheaths as his great form hunched over in attack stance.

"*Well done Goslingpaw, you're dead meat,"* she thought, bracing herself.

Not a sound was heard from the rest of the clan as Cougarstar continued, "*I sentence this disgusting rat to go and tend to the needs of the true scum of the earth, disgraces to the world of perfection! The Prickles are lowly, imperfect and revolting, so you will be perfect company. And for being a Crown Spirit forsaken eyesore because of those-"*

He gestured vaguely to the strange markings that had manifested under Goslingpaw's eyes. "*Things under your eyes, you can forget receiving your full name until I say so!"*

The cream and brown apprentice wanted to yowl that it was unfair, but a discreet warning hiss from Aldertrail and a look from Azuregale told her to hold her tongue.

The Crown Spirits only knew what Cougarstar would do if she dared to challenge him more.

The Leader drew the meeting to an end and stormed off, his children quickly following him. The rest of the clan broke off into their respective groups, whispering to each other about what had happened.

Goslingpaw drew in a breath and forced herself to stop shaking.

She was only faintly aware of her mentor gently guiding her away with a wispy tail on her back, as Azuregale, Slatepaw and Stonepaw cast looks of worry in her direction.

As mentor and trainee were heading back to the Nettlecave, Goslingpaw heard her mother saying something to Swanpaw. She pricked her ears, and what she heard made her heart feel like it was tearing into a million pieces.

"*I'm glad I raised you instead of that embarrassing clan disgrace, my beautiful swan. She's better off being a Prickle than being called my daughter and your sister."*

Goslingpaw bit her lip and tried not to sob. Her mentor gazed at her in worry. "*Goslingpaw, are you okay?"*

The Littlepaw stared at the ground, feeling like she was crashing into the endless depths of a deep dark chasm as the words of her own mother replayed in her head.

"*I'm fine."*

Chapter 5: Prickly Answers

Warning: This chapter is a little long.
TW: Slight mention of sensitive topics, don't read if you're uncomfortable with it.

Aldertrail gently curled her tail around her apprentice's, guiding her towards a small den that seemed in terrible condition.

"*Go in there and ask the Prickles what they need, and tend to them if they have issues. Afterwards come right back to the Nettlecave, I may still have time to bring you out to see the herb locations."*

Goslingpaw nodded numbly and walked into the den, and immediately her eyes widened in disbelief. All her life she'd been used to big and cozy dens lined with many soft nests made with moss, feathers and ferns.

The den she was in was in such terrible condition that there were patches gone from the walls of it. Leaves and twigs were clumsily inserted into the holes to try patching it up to no avail.

Puddles of rainwater, broken feathers and prey bones were scattered around the floor, and as the wind blew in through the den entrance, she heard the sticks in the patched holes rattle.

When Goslingpaw looked up, she jumped in fright when she saw five pairs of eyes staring at her, two of which were green, one blue, one amber and one a strange shade of orange.

"*W-who are you?"* She managed to stutter out, bracing herself. The owner of the pair of amber eyes, a skinny she-cat with a ragged sandy pelt and bony form, dragged herself out, and Goslingpaw nearly screamed at her appearance.

The she-cat's pelt was covered in many scars that seemed like they would never heal, and she was so thin her ribs were visible through her coat. Her cheeks were sunken in slightly, and sharp yellow teeth

poked out from under her upper lip.

Her body was so bony that her sparse fur looked like they had been stuck to the bone by tree sap, and the colour from them had clearly faded over the course of time.

"*Little one, there is no need to be scared of me. I don't bite, unlike what you've probably been told before coming here,"* the she-cat chuckled in a raspy voice.

The rest of the cats slowly slunk out of the shadows, and Goslingpaw gaped at how sick and malnourished they all looked.

"*What brings you here?"* She snapped out of her shocked trance at the elderly she-cat's voice.

"*I...I was sent here to tend to you all for defending myself and standing up against the royal heirs, along with these markings under my eyes,"* she mewed in a nervous tone.

"*I see. Those markings look nothing out of the ordinary, so rest assured we will not judge you for them,*" the she-cat rasped in her hoarse voice.

"*We do not require anything at the moment, young one, but I suppose we should introduce ourselves and tell you how we got here so you know what mistakes you should not commit in this clan,"* meowed the sandy she.

"*Come, fellow Prickles. Let us introduce ourselves; shall we?"* The five Prickles then surrounded Goslingpaw in a circle, and it was only then that she realised, much to her surprise, that one of the Prickles was a tom.

"*I shall start off. My name was Rabbithum and I was a Shine to the previous Leader in my younger days. I believe you weren't born yet when I was,"* The sandy she-cat purred.

Goslingpaw gazed in wonder at the she-cat before her, imagining her as a younger and much more beautiful version of herself.

"*How did you end up here then, if you were the Leader's Shine?"*

Rabbithum flattened her ears and sighed.

"*I was sick of being treated like a toy, a mindless pawn to the old Leader. I was even more afraid of his deputy back then, a stupid but brawny tom called Spikefrost. He vowed to force me to be his mate once he was Leader so I would bear his children."*

Goslingpaw could see that Rabbithum was trying her best to control herself from lashing out at the horrible memory from her past long ago.

"*He treated she-cats ten times worse than any tom, so any she-cat he desired to become his mate would be in deep trouble. As a result of paranoia and fear of being his mate, I managed to poison him with venomberries.*"

Her faint satisfied smile faded as she continued. "*But that idiot Cougarstar, Cougarblaze back then, saw me and reported me to the Leader, and after a lot of torturing I was thrown in here to live out the rest of my days."*

Goslingpaw blinked sympathetically and gazed at the other Prickles surrounding her, curious to hear their stories.

"*Guess I'll go next,"* another voice mewed, and the Littlepaw found herself staring into the blue eyes of a blue gray she-cat with gorgeous gleaming fur and a badly ripped ear.

"*My name is Cloudflower and I used to be a Shine as well. One of the more popular ones, in fact."* Goslingpaw nodded. She could definitely see why.

"*I despised all the attention I got, you see. Tom after tom wanted to be my 'breeding partner' and it was sick. I got thrown in here after I managed to fight off and disfigure one of the Claws that decided to get out of control.*"

She rolled her eyes and huffed rather indignantly. "*Well, as it apparently turns out that tom was a very important war general of BlazeClan."*

Goslingpaw nodded, her mouth forming into an 'O' shape as she did.

She turned to gaze at the brown tabby she-cat with green eyes, flinching when she saw the pink scar tissue lining her pelt and her ragged bony frame.

"*I assume you want to hear my story next, little one. My name was Chervilsky and I was a Nettle. I don't blame you for being scared of me, the only reason I got these scars was because of my stupidity."*

Chervilsky drew an agonised breath before she continued, "*Right after I graduated my training as a Nettle, I fell in love with a Shine. She was smart, witty and hilarious, and I loved her to death. Every stolen moment together with her was precious."*

The tabby paused, her eyes clouding with all of the fondest memories of her past like minnows in a pool.

Goslingpaw looked at her curiously. "*What happened then?"* Chervilsky unsheathed her claws and let out a low sound that sounded something between a snarl and an angry hiss.

"*Those stupid heirs Lichenpaw and Beetlepaw caught us together and told their father despite our pleas. Cougarstar sent Claws to hunt us down when we tried to run; I was caught and got the living daylights slashed out of my pelt. But my love..."*

The tabby shook her head, and immediately Rabbithum and the other she-cat who hadn't spoken yet gently pressed their pelts against hers for support as her bony body began to shake and tremble.

"*S-She died of blood loss when those sickening toms did...things to her. I was forced to watch, screaming as she cried and wailed for help until she could no more. Sunnyheart was her name, and I'll never forget her."*

Rabbithum gently shushed Chervilsky as she broke down, and Goslingpaw felt sorrow for the tabby Prickle who'd lost someone so dear.

"*I'm so sorry for your loss,"* Goslingpaw mewed, gazing at Chervilsky with remorse curling in her belly. Chervilsky shook her head, gazing at the cream and brown Littlepaw with teary eyes.

"*It's alright, little one. I swore to stay alive and remember her for eternity as tribute to her. She always wanted me to be happy.*" Goslingpaw bowed her head respectfully to the ex-Nettle, then gazed at the remaining Prickles.

The only she-cat who hadn't spoken yet, a white-furred calico with striking orange eyes, gazed at her, and in a soft yet rumbly mew, she began to speak.

"My story is no better than theirs. I am Poppystreak and I was a Nettle as well. Since young I was easily sick and always caught any disease. The Leader back then wanted to make me a Shine, but once made clear of me catching any sickness that came along, I was degraded to a Nettle."

Poppystreak flexed her claws and sighed. "*Of course, the Leader wanted me as a Shine for a reason. Orange eyes are considered an extremely rare blessing in BlazeClan, you see. If they're gifted to a she-cat, she is destined to bear the most beautiful children."*

She gritted her teeth and sighed. "*As such, one tom, I think he's called Snakebelly, took advantage of the fact I never learned to fight and tried to get me to bear his kits."*

Goslingpaw gasped. "*That's awful! Isn't that against the Crown Spirit Code?!"* Poppystreak snorted and waved a scarred paw rather dismissively.

" He clearly didn't care. He pestered me for many moons until I had enough and drugged him with poppy seeds before trying to stuff water hemlock in his mouth."

The calico curled her lip sourly and continued, "*Apparently though, we made quite a ruckus as the poppy seeds didn't work quick enough on him, and he accused me of seducing him during my trial.*"

Her ear twitched and she sighed. "*You know how corrupt our system is, little one. No matter how much I protested it wasn't enough. So I was tortured and sent here, and I've been staying in this snake-pit ever since."*

"I'm sorry to hear that," Goslingpaw mewed, and turned to the final

Prickle and the only tom in the den.

He seemed rather young, about the same age as a newly-made Claw, and his brown fur was matted and clumpy and his green eyes held nothing but sheer exhaustion.

"*My name is Hazepaw. I used to be a Titanpaw, but I initially wanted to become a Nettle."* This caught Goslingpaw's attention. She'd never heard of a tom who wanted to be a Nettle before.

"*Every chance I got, I snuck near the Nettlecave and memorise the herbs and treatments used for healing. Nobody knew my secret."*

He huffed before continuing with a trace of venom in his tone, "*But Cougarstar who was Cougarblaze back then didn't like that my mentor had a better chance of being deputy than him.*"

He groaned, "*To make matters worse, my mentor, that poor wretched soul, had an affair with a NestFolk cat, and Cougarblaze had discreetly followed us when I helped her to give birth to his kits."*

"My mentor was exiled and I was sentenced to stay here for the rest of my life for choosing to learn to live a life of cowardice instead of one with glory."

His short stumpy tail flicked. "*My mentor, not even the Crown Spirits know where he is, his mate and both his kits vanished from here ever since his exile, and I've never heard or seen any of them again."*

As soon as the male Prickle finished his tale, Goslingpaw was left speechless, and her limbs shook slightly with shock and anger towards her clan.

"*Say, young cat, what's your name?"* Cloudflower asked. "*Goslingpaw. That's my name,"* she mewed softly, gazing at the five cats who had been shunned from BlazeClan's sick society.

"*Well, Goslingpaw, you better be careful around. Don't make the same mistakes as we did,"* Hazepaw meowed grimly, his green eyes boring deep into her soul.

Goslingpaw nodded, and a new feeling of determination blazed in

her, and she left the Prickle den with a goal in her mind; to get rid of BlazeClan's sick ways one way or another, so more innocent cats wouldn't be hurt again.

Chapter 6: Drifting Melodies

The next several days seemed to drag by like a cat wading through a swamp.

Goslingpaw spent her time learning about herbs and healing methods from her beloved mentor, and she would often spend her time with the Prickles as they told her stories and spoke of their past experiences.

Slatepaw and Stonepaw also often stopped by to check on her, sometimes cracking a joke or two with her, and Azuregale would always come by to check on her and see how she was doing.

She was perfectly content with how her life was going on.

The other apprentices, not so much.

The other Titanpaws would trip her over everytime she wanted to head somewhere, and they always called Goslingpaw nasty nicknames like 'crow-food eater', or even worse, the 'whiny little kit'.

All the Starpaws were on Swanpaw's side because of the prophecy; they'd become her loyal followers and would join her in tormenting her sister every chance they got.

Along with the Titanpaws, they'd swipe their claws at her on purpose and dismiss it as an accident, and since the Titanpaws had their own separate den and the Starpaws had to share theirs with the Littlepaws, the she-cat apprentices would kick her out at night or wake her up in horrible ways like dropping a centipede in her nest.

This had gone on so long to the point that Goslingpaw had decided to sleep in the Nettlecave with her mentor. Of course, Aldertrail had been fully understanding and had allowed her in.

Today was slightly interesting, to say the least. The Littlepaw had been with Aldertrail, learning how to check kits for internal injuries or broken bones when a patrol burst in through camp, looking badly shaken.

Upon closer inspection, Goslingpaw noticed that majority of them were injured slightly, and the one Titanpaw with them, Depthpaw, was being carried by his mentor Nightscar.

"*What happened? Why is Depthpaw hurt?"* Azuregale asked, standing up from his perch where he'd been monitoring the activity in camp.

One of the Claws, a muscular russet tomcat with green eyes named Thornslash, shook his head and answered, "*Those wretched RoadWalkers are getting more bold with each passing day! They ventured in with some roaring monster and tried to grab us when they caught sight of us. One of them grabbed Depthpaw roughly and nearly took him away."*

He paused and gazed nervously at Depthpaw, and Goslingpaw remembered that the Titanpaw was his son.

"Hornetsting and I managed to claw that beast's paw, but the RoadWalker must've done something to Depthpaw's leg because he's been walking funny for a while, so we carried him back."

Azuregale nodded and mewed, "*I see. Go to the Nettles and get your wounds treated. I will report this to Cougarstar immediately."*

The Claws did as they were told, and as soon as they were a tail-length away from the Nettlecave, Aldertrail pulled Goslingpaw aside and mewed sternly, "*Goslingpaw, when they arrive, do not speak to them at all. Just treat their wounds quietly and hold your tongue. Got it?"*

The cream and brown she-cat nodded hurriedly, and watched as the Nettles in the cave bowed to the toms, and she hesitantly followed.

One of the smaller sized Claws came over for her to treat. She recalled that his name was Gustfang, and she knew she had to treat him because he was the only one whose wounds were within her

reach.

When he plopped down on the mossy nest, she tried not to flinch under his stare and scooped up a pawful of goldenrod to chew into a poultice for the scratch on his shoulder.

Unlike Depthpaw, none of the patrol seemed to be very injured, only a few minor scratches here and there, but some were still in shock.

As she began applying the poultice to Gustfang's scratches, a question formed in her mind. She knew Aldertrail had told her not to speak to the toms, but she was very curious.

"*What kind of monster did you see just now?"*

Gustfang blinked in surprise as he clearly hadn't expected Goslingpaw to ask him this, then he sighed and replied, "*Some big yellow beast with glaring lights for eyes and a long neck with huge jaws attached to it. It spits out smoke that can choke any cat and it's bigger than Sandstar's Oak."*

Sandstar's Oak was a massive oak tree that had caused the death of a former ruler of BlazeClan named Sandstar, and it was easily identifiable by the long scratches that ran down its trunk.

"*How many RoadWalkers were there?"* Goslingpaw continued as she gently applied cobwebs to bandage Gustfang's injuries. She prayed that Gustfang would just answer her questions and not get suspicious.

"*We counted five. Two held these weird things with spikes on the end that cut through any tree with ease. The others tried capturing us, though the Crown Spirits know for what."*

He seemed too weary to keep things to himself at this rate, much to the Littlepaw's relief.

Goslingpaw nodded and mewed, "*Okay, thank you Sir Gustfang. Your wounds are dressed and you may leave."*

The grey tom nodded wearily, his eyes half-lidded, presumably

from all the running from the RoadWalkers, and treaded out of the cave, slowly coiling his short tail up.

Goslingpaw watched as his grey tail vanished into the thick fern walls of the Claws' den, then snapped back to attention when Aldertrail called her over.

"*Yes, Aldertrail?"*

Her mentor gazed at her, then gestured down at Depthpaw who was writhing slightly in pain and meowed, "*I'm going to show you how to put a dislocated shoulder back. Fetch me some poppy seeds, first."*

Goslingpaw obeyed, and while she and her mentor waited for the seeds to dull the Titanpaw's pain, she overheard Azuregale speaking to Cougarstar.

"*At this rate we're going to have to stop any cat from heading out of camp; Firstone said that Thrushpounce and Cootpaw nearly got crushed by the RoadWalker beast,"* Azuregale sighed.

"*That is true. Maybe we should send out the Prickles so we don't have to risk our Claws' lives; they're disposable, after all. Or maybe force some of the she-cats. They think they only need to look beautiful and that's it,"* Cougarstar mused.

Goslingpaw did not want to hear what her foster father said next, and turned to Depthpaw just as he looked like he was growing sleepy.

"Goslingpaw, put your paws on his other foreleg, the one that's not dislocated. Hold it there, and watch what I do carefully. You've never seen it before," Aldertrail instructed.

The cream and brown Littlepaw positioned herself exactly as her mentor asked her to, and she watched as Depthpaw's eyes blinked sleepily at her before he murmured, "*Will I be lame forever?*"

"*Oh, poppycock. You won't. Brace yourself though, this will hurt a bit."* Aldertrail took the Titanpaw's injured leg between her teeth gingerly, placing a paw against his shoulder.

Before Goslingpaw could process what was happening, Aldertrail pulled on the leg, and a sharp click was heard.

Depthpaw let out a yowl and jerked slightly, and that was enough to send Thornslash running into the Nettlecave in alarm. "*Depthpaw! You stupid Nettles, what have you done to my son?!*"

Aldertrail rolled her eyes discreetly and meowed, "*Sir Thornslash, please do not interfere with the process of putting his shoulder back in place.*"

The Claw looked as if he was ready to tear open Aldertrail's chest, so Goslingpaw tensed her muscles should the Claw try to do so.

Her brown-furred mentor didn't seem too deterred by Thornslash's facial expression, ignoring it and instead turning to Depthpaw.

Thornslash hissed at her when she went closer, and the healer, now irritated by the Claw, turned to stare at him coldly before meowing, "*Sir Thornslash, I cannot examine your son's shoulder and ensure that he is fine if you don't let me. If you wish to carry on like this, there is no way of telling if he can stand properly or not.*"

Before the Claw could react, Aldertrail gently nudged Depthpaw to his feet. "*Try standing up and see if you can put your weight on it,*" she instructed.

The Titanpaw obeyed; staggering slightly not because of the pain but because of exhaustion and the effect of the poppy seeds. "*See?! He's staggering! He won't walk properly again! What kind of Nettle are you?!*" Thornslash protested.

Aldertrail suddenly snapped her head up to face the Claw and meowed, "*Forgive me if I sound rude, Sir Thornslash, but Depthpaw is much younger than the other Claws, is he not? He's staggering because of the exhaustion from running away from the RoadWalkers earlier.*"

As the Claw stumbled to find the right words to retort, more sharply, the she-cat added, "*It is absolutely necessary to give him poppy seeds to dull the pain in his shoulder; he'd feel more pain if I pulled his shoulder back without consuming them.*"

Turning to Goslingpaw, who'd stood there awestruck at her mentor's cool attitude the entire time, Aldertrail meowed, "*Take him to a spare nest and let him rest. When he wakes up check on him again, but I doubt there'd be any trouble.*"

Goslingpaw nodded and quickly guided Depthpaw deeper into the den as Thornslash began arguing with Aldertrail.

When Depthpaw had settled into his nest, he stared at Goslingpaw for a moment before mumbling, "*I'll be fine, right?*"

The Littlepaw nodded, hoping that her mentor knew what she'd been doing when she pulled the Titanpaw's leg back into place.

But the moment Depthpaw curled up with his eyes closed and his tail coiled over his nose, that was when Goslingpaw heard it.

The singing.

Goslingpaw turned her head. The Nettles were still treating the Claws' wounds, she winced when she heard Thornslash and Aldertrail still spitting angrily at each other, and the Claws were either resting or were leaving the den after their treatments.

Nobody seemed to hear the voices singing their song.

Nobody except her.

Soft, melodic notes drifted to her ears, calming her nerves and painting pictures of lush, evergreen meadows and warm sunlight in her mind.

The hypnotic sound waves stilled her shivering wings and sent a quiver of awe down her bones.

She could decode one verse of the song, when she strained her ears hard enough, and when she heard it, a chill ran down her spine.

"*Can you sing with the voices of the valley?*"

Goslingpaw stopped. Voices of the valley... wasn't that in the prophecy? Immediately, her thoughts ran amok.

But then, one question remained in her mind, one that she knew even the brainiest cat in BlazeClan couldn't find an answer to.

Who were the voices of the valley?

Chapter 7: Oh, Who Is He..?

That night, Goslingpaw curled up in her makeshift nest in the Nettlecave, right next to her mentor.

Guilt clawed at her belly when she saw a huge scar on Aldertrail's cheek where Thornslash had struck her during the day.

Goslingpaw pushed her nose gently into the moss, and closed her eyes, letting the soft sound of the other healers' breathing lull her to sleep.

In her dreams, she was pursuing a mouse in the forest, running free with nobody to stop her nor restrain her.

Suddenly, she heard something cranking loudly behind her, she found herself at least six tail-lengths away from a huge roaring metal beast, similar to the one Gustfang had described.

Its glaring lights blinded her, and its horrific roar would've turned any cat deaf. Thick black smoke spurted from its rear, its horrid smell seeping through the air and into her fur.

The beast had already crushed a good amount of trees in the forest, and Goslingpaw recognised Sandstar's Oak as one of the more badly destroyed ones.

However, as she'd never been in the woods that deep before, she had no clue where to go. That is, until she saw a snowy bird circling overhead. It seemed to be beckoning her to follow it, and the Littlepaw decided to do so.

The bird flew overhead, cruising towards one direction effortlessly while Goslingpaw struggled to keep up. Her paws felt sore, but she still ran.

She only realised she was out of the forest when she paused in front of a hard, stone-like barrier that blocked her off from a strange grey road, it's horrific stench burning her nostrils and making her gag.

Yet, the avian overhead seemed to not notice, instead choosing to fly over the path and cruised upwards and towards a massive hill rock covered in snow. Goslingpaw stared in shock at the hill rock. How was she supposed to get up there?!

But she knew she had to try. Taking a cautious glance at both sides of the grey path, she bolted across when she heard no sound and felt no vibrations against it.

When she stumbled onto the grassy patch at the opposite of the place she'd been in, she cast a last glance at the forest destruction behind her, and began her climb up the hill rock.

The narrow path along the massive hill rock didn't provide much help as it was covered in snow and ice. Her claws scraped on the icy rock as she struggled to climb up, the weather getting colder and colder as she hauled herself along.

At some point, she risked looking down, and realised that if she fell, she'd die instantaneously. It was a really long drop from her current position.

Swallowing her saliva as a futile effort to stop the burn in her throat, she continued her climb, narrowly avoiding a gap in the path that seemed to crumble even if a fly landed on it.

She didn't know how long it took for her to reach the top; by then she was already exhausted. Her paws sank into the snow on the hill rock's peak, freezing her paws and sending chills through her body.

The freezing flakes that fell landed on her fur, and her nose was constantly nipped by the chilly winds. Goslingpaw could literally feel her bones rattling as she moved in the cold.

But she knew she had to continue. She could see a path of starry footprints in the snow, and she followed them into a massive cave hidden by the towering snow-covered pines.

The entrance yawned open in front of her; Goslingpaw felt tempted to go in and collapse where she could rest her aching limbs. But those thoughts were shaken off when she heard the voices singing again.

They seemed closer, louder, as if they were telling her to come home.

Home.

Forgetting about her sore feet, the cream and brown Littlepaw sprinted out of the cave and pelted towards the direction of the voices.

They got closer with each step, and she was faintly aware of the snowy bird flying overhead, above her. It let out a cry, before swooping downward and vanishing through the trees.

She managed to make her way down the hill rock, finding the path and quickly racing down it with a few slips on the ice and snow, ignoring the burn in her pads.

It felt so relieving when her paws finally touched stone instead of snow, and later grass. Again, she was face-to face with the same grey path blocked by the stone barrier.

Squeezing under it, she bolted across the path and squeezed herself under the second barrier.

The voices were even closer now.

She could feel it.

She didn't care as the prickly branches scratched her limbs as she ran through the trees and bushes that grew opposite the path. She didn't care as the rocks scratched her paws painfully.

She felt as though her paws had wings as she leaped into the air to avoid bramble thickets scattered on the ground, soaring over them like a bird of prey.

As she ran, she noticed that plants were shooting up from the ground beside the places her paws were, as if they were welcoming her. When she saw an opening in the trees, she burst through it, and came face-to-face with an amazing sight.

A massive valley yawned ahead of her, with fresh green grass and blooming flowers of so many different colours. Butterflies and birds flew about freely, and the giant river nearby shone gold under the setting sun.

Suddenly, the snowy bird that had guided Goslingpaw to the hill rock earlier landed in the river, swimming about gracefully, its pristine feathers glistening. But then, something else caught the Littlepaw's eye.

Someone, in fact.

Perched on a flat stone sticking out of the river was a cat, a tom with brown and white fur. And like her, he had petal markings under his eyes too.

Goslingpaw tried approaching the tom, but all of a sudden, the valley began to fade. " Hey, wait! Who are you?!" She yelped out desperately to the tom with stars in his fur.

The last thing she saw was the tom's golden eyes staring at her before she crashed into the endless stronghold of dreamless sleep.

Chapter 8: Whispers From The Past

When day came, Goslingpaw was swamped with so many questions and thoughts. She could barely pay attention to what Aldertrail was saying until she received a sharp smack to her head.

"*Earth to Goslingpaw! Are you awake?"* Her brown furred mentor demanded. "*Ouch!"* The Littlepaw yelped, rubbing the sore spot with a paw.

"*Good, you're awake. Please pay attention, got it? You're not going to learn anything new should you keep zoning out,"* reprimanded Aldertrail sternly, earning a meek nod from Goslingpaw.

Her ears burned with humiliation when she saw Swanpaw and another Starpaw that went by the name of Hazelpaw snickering at her outside.

"*I'm going to quiz you on herbs and test how much you remember from our first lesson. I hope you were listening properly."* Goslingpaw quickly nodded and sat up straight.

"*What herb is used to help a kit's indigestion when digested?"*

"Thinned heather down."

"Which herb brings down swelling?"

"Nettle leaves."

"Which herb prevents tooth decay when chewed?"

"Uhhhh...alfalfa."

"What does chewed gumweed do?"

"Seals wounds from infections."

"Excellent. What herb treats kittencough?"

"Celandine...no, no, coltsfoot!"

"And what is celandine used for?"

"Used to treat ailments of the eyes."

A small sigh of relief. "*Herb that calm spasms and cramps?"*

"Belladonna."

"Okay, last one. Which herbs treat bellyache?"

"Juniper berries and... uh... oh, chervil, but yarrow is also used to make them sick up the poison first."

Aldertrail nodded in approval. *"Good memory you have, Goslingpaw. You will make an excellent Nettle in no time."* The Littlepaw felt pride surge through her body.

Aldertrail had praised her for her excellent memory and quick learning many times, and Goslingpaw resolved to work hard to get her name quick.

But something was still on her mind. Something that had been bothering her for very long.

"*Um... Aldertrail?"* Her mentor gazed at her, and replied, "*What's up?" "Who's my father?"* Goslingpaw asked. Aldertrail seemed stunned, as she never expected her apprentice to ask her that question.

"*Your father was a white and brown mackerel tabby with gold eyes under the alias of Blazeclaw here in the clan, but he was originally a DenFolk cat that escaped from the RoadWalker den."*

Aldertrail paused for a moment before continuing, "*Our old Leader then, his name was Squirrelstar, saw potential in him and accepted him in, and he mated with your mother shortly after. Sadly, he passed away during the snowy season due to severe blackcough about half a moon after you were born."*

Goslingpaw felt like she'd been splashed in the face with ice cold river water. So she had been the reason why her father was dead.

She hung her head down miserably when she remembered her mother screaming at her that she'd killed her own father after she'd been born, saying she was a *curse*.

She blinked back the oncoming onslaught of tears; she didn't cry. She *wouldn't* cry. Her mentor seemed to read her thoughts, as she leaned down until she was at eye-level with her trainee.

"*Goslingpaw, you must stop blaming yourself for your father's death. Dovetail is delusional if she thinks a newborn kit could've caused it."*

Goslingpaw flattened her ears and her mentor gently curled her tail around her and rested it on the Littlepaw's back, licking her ear as an effort to reassure her that it was alright.

Just then, Azuregale treaded in, holding a shrew in his jaws. He dropped it and meowed, "*My gosling, I brought prey for y- what's wrong?"*

Aldertrail turned to gaze at him and mewed softly, "*Commander Azuregale. Greetings. Aren't you supposed to be busy?"*

Goslingpaw turned to look at her foster father as he shyly scuffled his paws and mewed, "*Well, yes, but I supposed I should bring you some food so you don't forget to eat."*

"*Commander Azuregale."* Goslingpaw bowed respectfully to the deputy, refusing to meet him eye to eye. Azuregale stepped forward and sat beside her and Aldertrail, his eyes full of concern.

"*Commander, you shouldn't be here. Cougarstar will have our pelts if he sees you here,"* Aldertrail said quietly.

Azuregale looked like he was about to protest, but decided against it. Leaning down, he murmured, "*If something happened to you, please tell me, okay, my dear gosling?"*

The cream and brown she-cat nodded and headbutted her foster father's chest softly as her form of saying 'see you later'.

When the silvery tom was leaving the den however, he paused slightly, giving Goslingpaw enough time to catch the lingering look of desperation he directed at Aldertrail, who didn't seem to notice.

He seemed to have so many things he wanted to tell her, but he couldn't. There was another emotion in his eyes, it seemed almost as if it was...love?

Before Goslingpaw even thought of asking, he left the Nettlecave, his pawsteps fading with each step.

Gently, the rich brown she-cat nudged the shrew towards her apprentice and murmured, "*Eat, Goslingpaw. You need strength for later. I'm going to teach you how to swim."*

This caught her by surprise. "*Swim?"*

Aldertrail chuckled as her Littlepaw gawked at her in amazement. "*Of course. You need to know how to swim in order to get to places with herbs growing near water like watermint, feverfew, dock, marigold and sweet-sedge."*

Goslingpaw felt excitement course through her veins at the thought of knowing how to do something her sister wouldn't know how to do aside from learning about healing.

Ravenously, she tore off chunks from the shrew and began to eat, before she realised her mentor had nothing to eat as well.

Aldertrail must've sensed that her trainee wanted to offer her something to eat, because she meowed, "*Don't worry about me. I can just eat the berries from the bush that Willowflutter and Elmriver planted here."*

Then, Goslingpaw watched in amazement as her mentor treaded over to a bush beside the Nettlecave that had ripe, juicy-looking berries growing on them.

With the gentleness of a monarch butterfly, she plucked off the berries delicately and chewed them, before turning to her apprentice.

"*We planted these berries here because we tend to overwork ourselves gathering herbs and tending to the toms and their injuries from doing stupid things sometimes, thus giving us little time to eat."*

Goslingpaw nodded in understanding and both mentor and apprentice resumed their separate meals. She smiled softly.

Her mentor was the most amazing cat in the world.

Chapter 9: Consumed In Water

"*Goslingpaw, wake up. It's time."* The Littlepaw rose from her short nap when her mentor's soothing voice called her. After a quick stretch for her limbs, she padded out of the Nettlecave after Aldertrail.

"*Go wait by the Prickles' den while I receive permission to go out of camp. Don't speak to anyone unless it's absolutely important, got it?"* Goslingpaw nodded and set off towards the beaten den while her mentor cautiously approached Cougarstar's den.

When she was beside the Prickles' den, Rabbithum poked her head out carefully and purred, "*You seem excited, Goslingpaw. Where are you off to?"*

Goslingpaw jumped in excitement and mewed, *"Aldertrail's going to teach me how to swim!" "Oh, that sounds lovely." "It is! Soon I can dive down to find herbs!"* Rabbithum chuckled, and wished her good luck before looking in another direction and quickly withdrawing her head back into the den.

Upon glancing in the direction she'd been looking in, the Littlepaw saw her mentor approach her with a Claw by her side. She was disappointed that it wasn't Azuregale, but she wasn't too upset to see the short-tailed Gustfang with her mentor either.

"*Come on. We don't have all day,"* Aldertrail prompted her cream and brown Littlepaw forward as Gustfang curtly dipped his head to her and took the lead. The guards let them pass, and soon they were out of BlazeClan camp.

Goslingpaw felt like her breath was taken away at the sight of the forest. Trees were full of fresh green leaves, and the grass swayed in a welcoming manner as they walked on. Birds sang their merry songs as they flew around, and leaves rustled as squirrels and mice scampered about the forest floor.

Soon, they reached the river. Goslingpaw could only gasp at its image. The river extended multiple tree-lengths, and its surface glimmered gold and green. Small flashes of silver shone beneath the surface, and the Littlepaw could see small fishes darting about.

"*There's fish!"* She mewed excitedly. Quickly, she gave the water an experimental dab with her paw, but her mentor swiftly grabbed her paw and batted it away sharply.

"*We do not eat fish, Goslingpaw. We eat land animals like mice and squirrels,"* Aldertrail scolded, earning a snort from Gustfang. Goslingpaw bowed her head in embarrassment.

"*Come in. The water is shallow here,"* she instructed her apprentice, and Aldertrail waded into the water until she was in shoulder deep.

Goslingpaw felt Gustfang push her gently with a paw and murmur in his growly voice, "*Shove it."* She nervously stepped forward, feeling the chilling waves lap at her paws.

Slowly but surely, she felt the water rising up as she ventured deeper in. She wasn't aware of the drop in the ground below in the water, and suddenly felt as if she was consumed in water.

She tried to shriek for help, but water seeped into her jaws and all that came out was bubbles that rose to the surface. The icy water stung her eyes, and she flailed about desperately to try and resurface, flapping her limbs like a bird to try and propel herself to the surface.

Just then, she felt a pair of teeth grab her scruff and haul her up to the shallow bank. She gasped and spluttered for air, and when she finally blinked open her eyes, she saw Aldertrail and Gustfang staring down at her.

"*And that, Goslingpaw, is why a Littlepaw's first lesson of swimming is to always be careful of where you step,"* Aldertrail sighed.

She stared at the ground with humiliation and her mentor shook her head before beckoning her to go back in. This time, the cream and brown she-cat was careful to place her paws on safe places.

When she reached the drop, however, she stared helplessly at Aldertrail. The brown she-cat meowed, "*Kick off. Once you feel no ground beneath you start paddling."*

Goslingpaw gulped nervously and launched herself from the drop into the water. As she felt the water all around her, she began to kick frantically to stay afloat.

"*Don't kick like a frenzied animal!"* Aldertrail yelled. Immediately, Goslingpaw slowed her kicks down until she realised she wasn't sinking.

She turned her her head towards Aldertrail, who was now paddling in the deeper part of the water, her glossy brown fur slick with liquid. "*Come to me, Goslingpaw! Swim towards me! And keep your form straight!"* She called out.

Slowly but surely, the cream and brown she-cat managed to turn her body around and began kicking in the direction of her beloved mentor. When she started paddling, it was only then she realised it.

She was really swimming.

Once she reached Aldertrail, she gasped, "*Is this what the Titanpaws get to do in their training? Wow!"* Gustfang have an amused rumble-chuckle, and answered, "*No, Littlepaw. But we used to swim a lot before Cougarstar became leader."*

Goslingpaw was suddenly aware of Aldertrail using her tail to move her lower body, which was at a lower level in the water than her upper body, onwards the surface.

"*Keep your body straight and streamlined. You'll be able to move with ease this way,"* she explained patiently. Goslingpaw managed to do what Aldertrail had just said, straining herself slightly to keep her body straight and not sink downwards.

She and her brown-furred mentor practised paddling techniques and posture under the careful watch of Gustfang until Aldertrail finally announced, "*Alright, that's enough for today. You did well, Goslingpaw."*

The cream and brown apprentice smiled with excitement and paddled towards the shore, where she hauled herself up onto the grassy bank.

Gustfang flicked his small ears at her in amusement as she shook herself off, Aldertrail following suit. She turned back to Aldertrail as she began to speak again.

"*Through your apprenticeship, you will be challenging yourself to hold your breath underwater to dive down and forage for herbs. We will practice those exercises thrice every seven days,"* She mewed, her elegant pelt slightly drier than it was earlier.

Goslingpaw nodded in excitement, and Gustfang grunted, "*It's getting late, let's go."* As they began their walk back, Goslingpaw suddenly asked curiously, "*Why don't the Titanpaws learn how to swim?"*

Aldertrail glanced at Gustfang, who gave a snort and answered, "*Because our clan aren't fish-eaters. I suppose fish could equate to our usual land prey, but Cougarstar believes hunting fish takes extra effort and learning battle moves is more important than learning to swim."*

Goslingpaw made an 'oh' sound and nodded in slight understanding. Cougarstar was really stubborn and only his children could change his mind, and even that would take a very long negotiation.

"*Then do they practice tree-jumping?*" Gustfang looked at her in amusement and answered, "*Of course they do. Why else would our limbs be strong and healthy? We also learn to leap to certain parts of a tree to collect tree sap for our pelts."*

Goslingpaw tilted her head slightly as she remembered the Shines' glossy pelts. "*So the Shines also learn to tree-jump?*" Gustfang shook his head.

"*Nope. Cougarstar believes she-cats either just sit still and look pretty or just stay and skulk in the shadows if they're not dazzling enough. He doesn't see a need for them to know how to hunt or run around*."

He paused for a moment before he continued, "*Only reason the Shines have such healthy fur is because they take care of them and*

constantly preen themselves. Trust me, they can't leap from tree to tree for lizard-drops."

Goslingpaw stifled a giggle at that. "*What about the Nettles?"* Gustfang shrugged and grunted, *"Your mentor is right there, why don't you ask her?*"

Goslingpaw turned to Aldertrail, who gazed back at her before sighing and replied, "*We don't learn to tree-leap either. We barely have time to take care of our fur too. Cougarstar won't care for bird-dung if our pelts get ripped off."*

She awkwardly shared a glance with Gustfang before adding, "*It's a life or death situation whenever we have to retrieve a herb located in the trees, so we usually need to ask for help."*

Goslingpaw blinked, then nodded in understanding. From that point on, it was silence as the trio headed back to BlazeClan camp.

Chapter 10: Secrets Hidden

Goslingpaw leaned down, rasping her tongue against her spiked up fur. She enjoyed the soothing feeling of her tongue plastering down her soft fur, as it gave her a sense of comfort.

Her past few swimming sessions over the past week had gone surprisingly well, with Aldertrail's guidance and her will to improve, she had upgraded into a fast swimmer in a short time.

She thought back to those sessions, remembering fondly the soothing coaxes from her mentor to venture into deeper parts of the water.

Gustfang had been their 'security' to ensure nothing went south during their sessions, and Goslingpaw had been surprised to hear the usually strict and stoic tom actually praise her (only once) for her quick learning.

That didn't mean she had a perfect time though.

She'd nearly drowned during her third lesson, as she got distracted by the small silvery fishes darting about and had tried catching them, forgetting she was indeed not a fish and she had no capability of breathing underwater.

Aldertrail had rescued her in time and had given her a hard smack to her head before scolding her for getting distracted.

Not to mention, the Starpaws always taunted her ridiculous appearance after she'd emerged from the water.

She curled her lip when she recalled the Titanpaws calling her a mangy swamp rat when they saw her emerge from the river during their battle sparring sessions on many occasions.

Her train of thoughts was cut off when she saw Azuregale slowly approaching Aldertrail, his ears flattened nervously against his

head. "*Aldertrail? May I speak to you in private?*"

She heard him ask in a voice slightly softer than usual. Her mentor turned to him, and bowed her head respectfully before muttering, "*Yes, Commander Azuregale of BlazeClan.*"

Goslingpaw tilted her head in confusion as she watched them exit the camp. Her foster father had been acting more and more suspicious within the passing days.

He always found opportunities to brush his pelt innocently against her mentor's, ways to wrap his tail around her shoulders discreetly and always seemed to be staring at her in a lovestruck manner.

Not to mention, he constantly tried sharing prey with her, although the elegant she-cat had declined his efforts.

Goslingpaw remembered that the clan deputy had also tried multiple times to tell Aldertrail to stop overworking herself and rest, but in the same way her mother- she shuddered at that- would fuss over Swanpaw.

Curiosity was too much for her to handle, so as discreetly as she could, Goslingpaw waited until no cat was watching, she carefully snuck into the leafy bushes surrounding camp, before weaving her way to the path she was certain her mentor and her foster father had taken.

Her nose caught the same whiff of elm leaves and lavender that her mentor constantly had drifting around her, and Goslingpaw began following it in fear the scent would vanish if she didn't.

She continued a little while longer until she could hear voices in a clearing nearby.

Immediately, she crawled into a bush to eavesdrop, and saw Azuregale and Aldertrail standing face-to-face in the clearing.

"*Look, Aldertrail, I know this is really sudden, but.. uh.. I.. really like you, more than a friend.*" Azuregale finally blurted out. Goslingpaw's jaw dropped. The clan deputy has a crush on a healer?!

"*Azuregale... why?"* The silver tomcat seemed confused. "*What do you mean why..?"*

"There are other cats- the Shines- that are so much more beautiful than me. Why would you like ***me****, out of all cats?"* Aldertrail choked out, her tone full of shock.

Azuregale cracked a soft, shy smile. "*Because I don't care about looks. I love you for who you are. You're smart, caring and witty, something that those Shines clearly aren't. Please, Aldertrail, I really love you."*

Goslingpaw gasped softly, and waited for her mentor's response.

Aldertrail leaned forward and rubbed her head against Azuregale's before quietly mewing, "*Azuregale, I really don't know what to say. But I'm willing to give you- us, a chance. We have to keep it a secret, though. Only the Crown Spirits know what Cougarstar would do if he discovered us."*

Goslingpaw mentally cheered for her foster father's success at his confession. "*No one can know about us,"* Azuregale confirmed, twining his silver tail with Aldertrail's.

"Not even Goslingpaw." Goslingpaw felt her stomach drop when she heard her name.

"*Why not?"* Azuregale seemed surprised. "*She'd be happy for us, I'm sure. And besides, seeing that you're so close to her, I thought maybe we could..."* he trailed off.

Goslingpaw didn't know what he wanted to say, but her mentor must've known, because she replied quietly with a soft quiver of her tail.

" She's in enough trouble in the clan already. If she knows about us, nothing good would come out of it aside from being accused again. You know how brash Cougarstar is, Azuregale."

The silver tomcat sighed and nodded reluctantly before pricking his ears. Goslingpaw looked down and realised she was stepping on a shriveled, dried leaf.

"You don't suppose someone's watching us?" Aldertrail asked, glancing around.

Goslingpaw decided to run before she was discovered.

Chapter 11: Trust Issues

Goslingpaw stalked away from the laughing Titanpaws, her fur soaked with water and who-knows-what. She gritted her teeth as the slimy chill ran through her body.

She had just been minding her own business, sunning herself, before three Titanpaws, Rockpaw, Lionpaw and Cootpaw, had decided to chuck soggy moss balls at her.

She held back a hiss when she heard the Starpaws laughing hysterically at her, and slid her claws out in a rage. Just because she was a Littlepaw didn't mean she could be picked on constantly!

She stomped over to the Nettlecave and sat down, furiously spewing out curses under her breath.

When she heard faint pawsteps behind her, her first reaction was to whirl around and let a deathly hiss explode from her throat.

She barely managed to stop herself from snapping at Depthpaw's face when she saw him standing there with a dry bunch of moss in his jaws and a shocked expression on his face.

"*What? Come to mock me for being a river rat?*" She snarled, glaring at him furiously. Depthpaw dropped the moss awkwardly and said nervously, "*I-I just thought I'd help you dry off..."*

Goslingpaw narrowed her amber-green eyes and was about to snap at him to get lost when one of the other Nettles, a ginger and white she-cat named Stempetal, stepped over.

"*Goslingpaw, manners please,*" she mewed softly, her gaze steady. Before the cream and brown she-cat could protest, she bowed and meowed respectfully, "*Greetings, Depthpaw, Son of General Thornslash*."

Goslingpaw huffed and reluctantly bowed to the russet Titanpaw,

knowing all too well his father was the highest ranking warrior in BlazeClan and his son deserved all respect.

Stempetal gave the Littlepaw a gentle stare before she said in her soft voice, "*Aldertrail is busy today, Goslingpaw. Please don't get her to rush here and there. Hold your tongue if you have nothing nice to say, alright?*"

Goslingpaw sighed and nodded. Her mentor was out on an expedition to the Pool of The Crown Spirits accompanied by both Berrytrail and Azuregale as more and more RoadWalkers monsters had ventured deeper into the forest, rendering hunting near impossible for BlazeClan.

She recalled one of the other Nettles, Lotusheart, lamenting that the monsters had run over multiple juniper bushes, yarrow bunches and dock leaf clumps, so they had to preserve the remaining herbs left.

It was still no secret that the Nettles knew that was going to be impossible because of the Claws always doing reckless stunts to get them injured.

The Littlepaw had wondered why Aldertrail didn't take her along, before then remembering Azuregale's confession to her mentor and batting the thought away.

She had also asked another healer, Willowflutter, why Cougarstar didn't go as well.

She was not surprised to hear that Cougarstar had wanted to have a 'future leadership lesson' with his children so he instructed Azuregale to go with the two healers and report back to him.

Goslingpaw was pretty sure it was an excuse to just laze about in the sun.

Suddenly, a couple of pawsteps were heard running towards her, and she turned to see Slatepaw and Stonepaw running towards her. "*Gos! Are you okay?!*"

They asked in unison. Goslingpaw held back a laugh as the brothers stared at each other in surprise at having said the same thing at the

same time.

Suddenly, Stonepaw's eyes narrowed and he glared at Depthpaw. "*Why are you here? Come to mock our best friend?"*

Depthpaw took a step back, alarmed. "*I-I just want to help her dry off!*" Slatepaw unsheathed his claws, hissing at the russet tomcat until Goslingpaw sighed in sheer exasperation.

"*Enough, okay? Just-help me dry off and go do whatever important Titanpaw stuff you all were doing. I'm going to get in trouble again if any of the Claws, or even the Royals catch us*."

Quicker than an adder, the grey-furred brothers snatched up the moss and began using it to soak up the water dripping off Goslingpaw's pelt, dabbing some areas profusely and wringing them out on a nearby grass patch.

All the while, Depthpaw just stood there awkwardly, not knowing what to do.

"*So, um..*" he began nervously. "*Where's Aldertrail?*" Goslingpaw looked skeptically at him and replied bluntly, "*At the Pool of Crown Spirits." "Oh. Uh, why didn't she take you along?*"

The cream and brown she-cat narrowed her eyes and grunted, "*And why is that your business?*" The Titanpaw flinched at her icy tone and took another step back, while the two brothers shot glares at him.

Depthpaw started backing away from the trio's irritated glares, only to end up bumping into Swanpaw and her cronies.

Honestly? Goslingpaw was pretty sure she went there on purpose to humiliate her for being the less relevant sister.

"*Oh, would you look at Miss Swamp Rat! How was your bath, goosebrain?*" Cackled Swanpaw, her gang cackling along with her. Goslingpaw gritted her teeth and muttered, "*Knock it off*."

"*Why? Can't take a little insult, Littlepaw? C'mon, Depthpaw,*" the white she-cat then purred seductively, curling her tail around his shoulder blades and puffing out her fur, causing him to flinch. "*Come hang*

out with me instead of my loser sister."

Two of the other Starpaws, Honeypaw and Streampaw, treaded closer, shooting smug glares at the cream and white she-cat while curling their tails around the Slate and Stone brothers, who looked visibly disgusted and uncomfortable.

The other Starpaws, Cinderpaw and Hazelpaw, joined their 'leader' in smirking arrogantly at the medicine cat apprentice while flaunting their beauty, whilst the remaining Starpaw, Softpaw, seemed visibly uncomfortable, her tail drooping and her head lowered.

Suddenly, Slatepaw and Stonepaw shoved both Honeypaw and Streampaw away, causing them both to land right into the patch of soaking wet grass and mud.

They shrieked as the dirt splattered onto their fur, and at the same time Depthpaw also managed to shove Swanpaw away and into the muddy grass patch as well.

Collective yelps of disgust were heard as the three Starpaws struggled to get up from the muddy patch, while Hazelpaw, Softpaw and Cinderpaw were yelping like dogs about the mud on their fur.

Goslingpaw had moved away from the Nettlecave entrance when the brothers shoved their harassers away, so she was safe from the mud shower.

She and the three Titanpaws couldn't hold back their laughter when the Starpaw trio finally stood up.

They looked even worse than her, their once beautiful pelts caked in a thick layer of dung-brown mud with bits of grass and black bits inside.

Their fur was a sight too; once glossy and healthy, now completely caked in mud that made it look as if the Starpaws had dipped each individual hair in a heap of dung.

"*What's wrong, prophecy cat?*" She snickered hysterically. "*Can't take*

a little mud shower? I think the colour dung-brown suits you!"

Her little comment just caused Slatepaw and Stonepaw to roll onto the ground laughing while Depthpaw tried desperately to keep a straight face.

"*Why you little-!*" Swanpaw stomped towards her sister, ready to either scratch her or shout at her, when a booming voice snarled, "*Are you lot DONE harassing the poor Littlepaw?!*"

Then, Elmriver stepped out of the den, looming over the apprentices with something running down her chin that looked like blood.

For a Nettle, Elmriver was surprisingly more muscular and bigger sized that the other she-cats, so she was easily the heron among a parliament of owls. She glared at the Starpaws and scoffed.

"*What's with the mud shower? Moisturising fur care technique?"* Swanpaw seemed to be at a loss for words; either that or she was afraid of the burly she-cat, so it was a relief for her and her gang when Dovetail approached them.

"*My baby! My poor baby! What happened to you?!*" She fussed over Swanpaw for a moment, before swinging around to glare at Goslingpaw. "*You stuck up little brat! How dare you hurt your sister, the cat of the prophecy!"*

Slatepaw and Stonepaw were quick to jump to her defence, standing beside her and protesting that she hadn't done anything wrong.

"*Mother, it's true! She tried harassing and hurting me! Depthpaw is our witness!*" Swanpaw fake-sobbed, discreetly shooting Goslingpaw a smug glance, confident that the BlazeClan General's son would stand up for her.

Dovetail swung around to look at the russet furred tom, and immediately, Slatepaw and Stonepaw shot killer death glares at him.

It came as a surprise when Depthpaw stared back at Swanpaw with an icy gaze, replying stiffly, "*I saw that Goslingpaw did no such thing.*

You are the ones who came to harass her first, and I did not agree to be your witness."

Swanpaw sputtered in shock, while Dovetail seemed to be trying to find an excuse to justify Swanpaw's 'innocence' and blame her less-preferred daughter.

"*As much as I find this entertaining*," Elmriver snapped, causing all heads to turn to her. "*I'm going to have to ask all of you to leave except for Goslingpaw. All you Starpaws are absolute eyesores, and the Titanpaws have more important things to do."*

Grumbling, Dovetail led Swanpaw away, and the cream and brown she-cat heard her mutter, "*Someday she'll take orders from you, my love. Don't listen to her.*"

The other Starpaws followed, giving the Littlepaw a last glare before doing so. Except for Softpaw, who hurriedly apologised before scampering after her fellow to-be Shines.

Depthpaw seemed hesitant to leave, but he obeyed with a last glance at Goslingpaw and the Slate and Stone brothers were soon to follow with a goodbye from each of them.

Goslingpaw glanced up at Elmriver, who wiped away the red liquid from her lips. "*It's berry juice, don't worry,*" she chuckled.

Goslingpaw cracked a grin, and Elmriver winked before saying, "*Aldertrail won't hear of this, no worries, Littlepaw. Nettles always stick together."*

Chapter 12: Curse Or Enchantment

Later that day, Goslingpaw found herself in the Prickles' den again, listening to the stories they were telling as she helped to clean their den.

"*...and then I said to her, 'At least I know how to actually care for my fur and not look like a raggedy hedgehog all the time.' Ha! The look on her face was priceless,*" Rabbithum purred, telling a story from her old glory days.

Hazepaw smiled warmly at Goslingpaw as she returned with another fresh bundle of moss, and she returned the smile politely.

Earlier she had taken out the old moss and used it to soak up the puddles of water on the floor before discarding it outside near the Dirt-Hole.

She had gone on a long hunt to find fresh moss, and even when she did, she had only found a pathetic little bundle of it.

She dropped the fresh moss and started patting it down into the holes in the ground where the Prickles slept, and Cloudflower spoke up, "*Much thanks to you, Goslingpaw. We're all thankful for your help this moon.*"

The Littlepaw smiled shyly and replied, "*It's no problem."*

"*Little one, why are you bringing in such small bundles? You need us to go help you?*" Poppystreak asked in concern. Goslingpaw laughed awkwardly and flicked her tail reassuringly.

"It's no biggie. The fresh moss I find just comes in tiny clumps, I can't find a lot at once for some reason. Even if I do," she paused and gestured to her body. "*I'm too small to carry a whole load without it falling off*."

"*You have no need to worry about moss, young Littlepaw*," the soft voice of Rabbithum mewed.

"*We're fine with sleeping on the ground, or just having fallen leaves, feathers and ferns in our nests. If those aren't available...*" The elderly she-cat smiled and brushed her tail away and lifted her head up to reveal patches of fur gone from her chest.

Goslingpaw gawked in amazement. "*You-you pluck out your own fur?!*"

Rabbithum chuckled and replied gently, "*There's a lot of things I'm willing to sacrifice so others have a better life. I'm old already; I don't see myself here to witness it if BlazeClan goes through a change or that 'prophecy cat' sister of yours does something useful for once."*

Chervilsky suddenly turned to gaze at her in amusement. "*Speaking of, I heard the ruckus outside earlier. I hear that sister of yours got coated in mud and dirt?*"

Goslingpaw cracked a laugh. "*Too right! She and her gang were drenched in it!*" The Prickles let out soft peals of laughter. Hazepaw giggled, "I'd love to see their faces!"

When the laughter subsided, Goslingpaw had only finished the second nest, and that was barely even close to the amount of moss that the toms in the clan had in their nests.

She mentally debated whether she she should steal moss from the Claws' den and replace it with poison ivy and stinging nettle instead, then decided not to in case she was discovered to be the culprit.

Frustrated, she sighed dramatically and sat down on the stone ground. "*S'matter with you? Something happen?*" Poppystreak asked, tilting her head to one side.

"*I just feel bad that I can't do more to provide for you guys, and those bone-brained toms keep shoving me down because I'm a Littlepaw. And my sister keeps trying to steal my best friends away from me, it makes me so... AARGHHH*!"

The cream and brown apprentice slammed her paws on the ground in a fit of frustration. What she and the Prickles didn't expect was for spiked tendrils to come shooting out of the stone ground, scattering small bits of rock everywhere.

The six cats in the beaten-up den jumped in alarm as the tendrils began snaking around the walls of the beaten den, weaving themselves into all the nooks and crannies and twining themselves around the miniature stalactites and stalagmites as if they were anacondas strangling a poor helpless fawn.

When the tendrils stopped moving, they had woven themselves into intricate patterns on the walls, some ends dangling down and shining as if covered in slick poison.

There was a moment of horrified silence as the cats took a minute to comprehend what had just happened. Then, Chervilsky broke the silence by gasping, "*What was that-?!*"

Goslingpaw froze as six pairs of eyes turned to look at her. Panic settled in and she began spluttering, "*I-I don't know! I-I swear I really have no idea how I did that!*"

Cloudflower quickly hurried over and began patting the apprentice on the back to try and calm her down. Goslingpaw opened her mouth to respond, but was cut off when she heard it again.

That hypnotising melody. It seemed she couldn't catch a break from the singing. The glorious voices blended together in a beautiful chorus, singing to the heavens above.

The singing was so hypnotic that it had drawn Goslingpaw into a trance, and it was only when Cloudflower started shaking her did she finally come to her senses.

"*Goslingpaw? Are you okay?*" The ex-Shine asked in worry. At that moment, the singing seemed to have stopped. "*You-you guys didn't hear that?*"

The Prickles stared at her as if there were hares parading out her ears. "*Hear what?*" Rabbithum asked in confusion. "*The singing..?*"

Poppystreak stepped towards her and felt her forehead with a paw. It was then did the Littlepaw catch a glimpse of pink scar tissue on the calico's paw where one of her toes should've been.

"*Are you feeling alright? I think you're hearing things. It could be a side effect of-*" she paused and gestured to the tendrils. "*That.*"

Goslingpaw swallowed and said she was fine before quickly saying goodbye to the stunned Prickles. As she hurried out of the den, she knew she had her answer to her biggest question.

Her sister was not the cat of the prophecy, was she? If she was, she would've heard the voices singing too, and probably also received complimentary powers as well.

But judging by her behaviour and actions, the cream and brown she-cat knew she was not the cat of the prophecy at all.

If Swanpaw had powers, she'd be showing off and flaunting them to mock Goslingpaw, and she would be planning out loud on how to find the voices or solve whatever the prophecy said with Cougarstar.

But she hadn't.

Goslingpaw took a deep breath and stared up at the sky, recalling the prophecy Berrytrail had received. 'A beautiful avian of grace will soar above the peaks, following the songs of glory to complete what the lost star did not.'

There was a chance that the one in the prophecy could be her, but her sister was more beautiful and graceful than her. And she still had no clue what 'songs of glory' or 'lost star' referred to.

"*Crown Spirits, just why are your prophecies so complicated to decipher?!*"

Chapter 13: Hurt and Comfort

TW: Sensitive topics.

Rockpaw let out a yelp as Goslingpaw not-so-gently plucked out a fat tick that was on his ear. "*Shut up and stay still*," she muttered icily, dropping the meddlesome tick on a dock leaf before sending a claw through its fat abdomen.

She wrinkled her nose at the blood that spurted out, and folded the leaf before pushing it away and focusing on extracting the rest of the meddlesome pests.

Gustfang had come in this morning, all three of his sons, Rockpaw, Slatepaw and Stonepaw in tow and looking very visibly in discomfort.

He told the Nettles that the Titanpaw den had been infested with ticks, and his sons were the ones with the worst cases whilst the other Titanpaws were relatively fine.

Stonepaw was receiving urgent attention from Aldertrail, Vinespring and Elmriver because four ticks had burrowed deep down into his ear canal.

A distance away Slatepaw was being tended to by Berrytrail and Willowflutter because there were seven stuck in his front paw and a huge number of them sucking blood from his torso area.

Which left her with her best friends' annoying older brother Rockpaw.

Now, she was pulling out ticks from his ear while Stempetal helped her with the ones on his paws while Dawnheart and Lotusheart were both busy preparing the poultices to apply to their wounds.

As she plucked out the last tick from his ear, Rockpaw gasped in relief. "*Can I go now?*" He demanded.

Goslingpaw glared back at him and answered snappily, "*No. Lie your tail back down and let me check if there's any more that went into your ear*."

Rockpaw scowled at her and grudgingly did as he was told, and the Littlepaw gently pulled his ear and peered in. Nothing.

She did the same with the other one, and there was also nothing in there. That was good for Rockpaw, though she privately wished there were more.

"*You have to stay in here until the poultice is applied to your wounds, Titanpaw,*" Stempetal meowed as Rockpaw looked ready to get up.

The Titanpaw groaned in exasperation and put his head back down, and Goslingpaw had to hold back a snort.

Stempetal gazed at her and meowed, "*Littlepaw, you can go out if you want. Aldertrail tells me you deserve a break from your hard work these few moons*."

Goslingpaw smiled, ignoring the scoff from Rockpaw and dipped her head respectfully to the Nettle before retreating out of the Nettlecave.

She sighed as she plopped down onto her nest in the she-cat apprentice den. She knew the den would be empty at this time because the Starpaws were usually out training.

She kneaded the moss with her paws, and let out a breath as she enjoyed her time in solidarity.

That didn't last long, however. Her gold-amber eyes caught sight of Softpaw sitting in the clearing, quietly grooming herself. A Claw was nearby, his head directed at the pretty Starpaw.

He seemed to be sniffing at her in the same way a dog would to a piece of prey, and it made a shiver run down the Littlepaw's spine.

Goslingpaw recalled his name to be Cobrastrike; she'd recognise his green and blue eyes anywhere. They were directed right at the Starpaw, glinting with what seemed to be malicious hunger.

Quiet as a mouse, Goslingpaw got into a crouch, her gaze trained on the dusky brown giant, like a snake ready to strike.

Her sharp ears caught Cobrastrike letting out a low growl, and his eyes seemed to be looking Softpaw up and down like he was sizing her up. The Littlepaw knew something was wrong.

It was against the code for a Claw to force themselves onto a Starpaw before they became a Shine, and the only exception would be if there were no current Shines.

Cobrastrike couldn't be thinking of... could he?

Softpaw seemed to have noticed the Claw, and seemed rather creeped out. Still, she asked politely as she could, "*Hello, Sir Claw. Is there something you need?*"

Cobrastrike chuckled in a creepy way, before leaning over and replying, "*Now, now, gorgeous. No need for any 'Sir' formalities with me. Just call me Cobrastrike, beautiful one.*" right into her ear.

Goslingpaw stared at the outrageous tom in disbelief. How could he get away with this in broad daylight?! She dug her claws into the moss, tearing it slightly.

"*Say, my pretty, would you like to... play a little game? It must be boring cooped up in camp while your mentor is...ah, busy,*" he purred directly into her ear.

Goslingpaw failed to understand how the Starpaw was still sitting there when she could've made up an excuse to leave. Heck, if it was her she would've clawed him and his big ugly snout!

Her heart fluttered in fear for the unfortunate Starpaw like a trapped butterfly. She'd seen Softpaw's mentor Chanterellestreak leave camp with another tom earlier, so there was no way she'd be there to help her apprentice.

She stared back at the Claw, who actually had the nerve to swipe his tongue around his jaws like the torbie she-cat before him was a piece of juicy prey.

Goslingpaw was about to march right up to the nasty Claw when Softpaw nervously asked, "*What kind of game, Sir?" "Ah, ah, what did I say about formalities, darling?"* The disgusting Claw smirked, as he stood up.

Goslingpaw turned her gaze to the Sunrock when she detected movement and spotted her foster father pause mid-grooming to stare at the Claw, who didn't seem to notice.

She dug her claws deeper into the moss when Cobrastrike purred, "*Why don't we go to the forest for the game? I promise you it'll be fun, my beauty.*"

He curled his tail around the smaller she-cat's shoulders and stroked her head with a huge paw, his jaws stretched into an ugly lecherous smile.

Goslingpaw was right about to stand up to defend Softpaw when she nervously stood up and reluctantly agreed.

The lecherous tom smiled wider and led the Starpaw away from camp, and Goslingpaw's first reaction was to dash out after them, or at least it was until someone grabbed her by her scruff.

"*Dad?*" She asked in surprise as the BlazeClan deputy dropped her on the ground gently.

Most of the Claws and Shines were out with their apprentices, and Cougarstar was out on a private hunting mission with his children, so nobody had thought of asking why a Claw brought a Starpaw out of camp.

"*You saw them too, my daughter?*" Azuregale asked softly, his eyes darting to where Cobrastrike and Softpaw had vanished.

A vigorous nod from the Littlepaw was enough to tell the deputy there was another witness to the possible crime.

"*I'm going out to find them,"* Azuregale growled under his breath. Goslingpaw asked, "*Can I come too? You might need a healer in case...you know...*"

The BlazeClan deputy stared down at his adopted daughter, who had resorted to giving him the eyes of the wounded kitten.

He sighed in defeat and nodded before muttering into her ear, "*But you must stay quiet and not do anything to give yourself away*." Goslingpaw nodded, and both father and daughter set off to look for their clanmates.

Azuregale opened his jaws, drinking in the scents of the forest, before closing it and heading in the direction where Goslingpaw knew a couple of juniper berry bushes grew.

Her father moved with very fast strides, and she was having difficulty keeping up.

He stopped in his tracks after a while of walking, and then used his tail to gesture for Goslingpaw to come closer and keep quiet.

She did as she was told, heart pounding vigorously, and pricked her ears as she heard voices. The two crouched down and moved closer to the bushes blocking their vision to listen.

"*Close your eyes, beautiful. It's not called a special surprise for a reason*," the voice of the disgusting Claw purred. He'd barely even finished the first sentence when Goslingpaw scrunched her eyes shut.

A shuffling noise was heard, and Softpaw's voice came out in a terrified whimper, "*No, no, no, please stop, sir...*"

"*Hush, my beauty. No formalities, okay?*" More shuffling noises and a terrified yelp. Goslingpaw had an image of what was happening in her mind, and she curled herself into a ball out of fear.

"*...about to do something only the most beautiful she-cats can do. They're lucky that they get to do this with Claws all the time*."

The Littlepaw knew Softpaw was in trouble. She opened one eye, and nearly shrieked with horror at what she saw. *Cobrastrike?! No! You can't do that to Softpaw!*

All of a sudden, Azuregale suddenly stood up and stormed into the

clearing, before he bellowed, "*And what is going on HERE?!" "A-Azuregale! What are you doing here?!*"

Cobrastrike yelped in alarm, scrambling out of his position to bow to the deputy, leaving Softpaw lying on the ground, broken and deflowered.

"*It's GENERAL Azuregale to you. And never mind what I was doing; I should be asking YOU that question!"* Goslingpaw barely heard what her foster father said next because she had hurried off to get cobwebs.

There was blood oozing out of claw marks on the Starpaw's legs, and a pool of it surrounded her lower regions. Tufts of fur from her pelt were drifting around in the air, and her limbs were splayed out in a injured position.

She found some on a nearby log, and picked up a stick before gathering the cobwebs with its thinner ends. Retracing her steps, she found the clearing again, and this time she heard what her father was saying.

"*You fool! There are so many Shines in the clan and you choose to do the deed with an underaged APPRENTICE?! SHE'S BARELY NEAR THE AGE OF A YOUNG SHINE*!" He roared.

"*B-But General Azuregale, I-" "Shut up!*" The deputy screeched furiously, sounding akin to a million angry owls.

Goslingpaw decided it was time she intervened. Trying not to appear suspicious, she pushed past the bush and entered the clearing, and immediately her foster father and Cobrastrike turned to look at her.

"*G-General Azuregale, I was just collecting mouse bile for the tick infestation*," she stammered, trying to appear scared.

Her father seemed genuinely furious with the dusky brown tom, and his eyes didn't seem to soften at the sight of his daughter.

Goslingpaw tried not to shrink under his scorching gaze as she'd never seen him so mad before. His eyes burned with sparkling

embers of an inferno of fury at what his clanmate had done.

"*Littlepaw. Get yourself over here now and check if the Starpaw is okay*," he huffed in a gruff tone. Goslingpaw quickly obeyed and scampered over to Softpaw.

Her breathing was shallow and her eyes were shut tight, and Goslingpaw felt a knot of pity twisting in her belly as Softpaw flinched at every single small touch.

Her ear flicked when she heard Azuregale continue to yell at Cobrastrike, who at this rate was cowering in fear, and her heart churned with anger directed at the brown tom.

Fast as she could, she applied the cobwebs to her wounds to stop the bleeding, but she could tell something else was wrong, and she needed a more skilled medic to help find out what it was.

Turning to Azuregale, she quietly asked, "*General Azuregale, I request your assistance to carry Softpaw back to camp for further examination.*" The silvery tom huffed and growled, "*Fine, put her on my back."*

Goslingpaw gripped the Starpaw's scruff in her teeth and pulled her up onto her foster father's back gently, and the grey tom turned to her and gave her an order in the most commanding tone he could muster.

"Go, scat. I'll bring her back to the Nettlecave. And YOU," he paused and swung around to glare at Cobrastrike, who flinched and backed up in fear.

"*Are going straight to Cougarstar's for a little talk. I'm sure he'd be back in camp by now*," snarled the BlazeClan deputy, his voice dripping with malice.

Cobrastrike gulped and bowed to him before mumbling, "*Yes, General Azuregale." "LOUDER!" "Yes, General Azuregale!*"

Goslingpaw quickly turned and hurried back the way she'd come, hearing her father's pawsteps behind her.

When she ducked into camp, Aldertrail was out of the Nettlecave,

and when she saw her, she mewed in annoyance, "*Goslingpaw, where were you*?"

The Littlepaw barely had time to reply when Azuregale stalked into camp with the limp Softpaw on his back and a terrified Cobrastrike in tow.

Registering the look of shock on her mentor's face, Goslingpaw cracked an awkward smile and answered, "*It's a long story*."

Chapter 14: Over The Edge

TW: Mentions of PTSD

"*Goslingpaw, come here*."

The cream and brown she-cat treaded lightly towards her mentor, making sure not to disturb the other Nettles who were resting before Cobrastrike's trial.

Her mentor's rich scent gave her a sense of comfort, and she inhaled it in before gazing into Aldertrail's green eyes.

The rich brown she-cat sat her down, then in a quiet voice, she spoke, "*Goslingpaw, I have a huge task for you. I need you to monitor Softpaw and help her move forward in her life.*"

She paused, before she lowered her voice and whispered into her ear, "*She's been diagnosed with PTSD, which is post-traumatic stress disorder.*"

Goslingpaw felt her eyes go wide. This was bad; so very bad.

Aldertrail sighed and continued, "*All of us Nettles have discussed this together, and Chanterellestreak has vocally given her approval for you to help her Starpaw in these times. I hope you understand what I am asking of you requires a lot out of you.*"

Goslingpaw gave a determined nod. "*I will help her out, no matter the cost,*" she mewed strongly.

Aldertrail smiled at her warmly, and rested her chin on the Littlepaw's head in a motherly way. "*That's my apprentice*," she purred softly, and Goslingpaw felt her heart swell with pride.

"*All cats above the age of a Titanpaw, gather beneath the Sunrock to hear my words!"* Cougarstar's almighty yowl rang out, and Aldertrail heaved herself to her paws.

"*Goslingpaw, I want you to stay here and don't shoot off any smart remarks to the Titanpaws and Starpaws to get yourself in trouble. You can watch from the Nettlecave, but never leave Softpaw alone,*" she warned, before Aldertrail headed off towards the Sunrock.

No sooner had her mentor left, the Slate and Stone brothers peeked in and gave her the stink eye.

She snickered and gestured for them to come in to keep her company. After a warning not to touch anything, Slatepaw cast a nervous glance to Softpaw, his tail twitching slightly.

"Will she be okay?" He murmured to the Littlepaw.

"*Only time will tell,*" came her soft response. "*I still don't understand why we can't attend the trial. It's so unfair!*" Complained Stonepaw.

The cream and brown she-cat shrugged and gazed at the sleeping Softpaw, before directing her attention to the Sunrock.

Cougarstar had leaped onto the Sunrock, his children by his side. Azuregale was sitting beside them, his eyes slitted and teeth glinting.

On the other side was Thornslash, his tail curled neatly around his paws. The Head Shine and Nettle Sunshimmer and Berrytrail, were in front of their groups, sitting tall and regal.

Goslingpaw saw her mother sitting at the back of the Shines, her eyes trained on Sunshimmer. She looked as if she wanted to kill Sunshimmer and take her place.

Goslingpaw scowled. Her mother would do anything for popularity.

Three of the Titanpaws were huddled in their den, watching with wide eyes while Depthpaw was crouched under a bush nearer to the trial. The Starpaws were all curled in their den, watching curiously.

Her ears pricked up when Cougarstar started to speak. "*BlazeClan, it has come to my attention that one of our Claws have broken a rule in the Code of the Blazing Star.*"

Stonepaw shifted closer to Goslingpaw and whispered, "*I overheard Azuregale somehow convincing Cougarstar to give the trialed cat a worse punishment that he usually would've given to a Claw. This is gonna be good*."

Goslingpaw shifted and didn't say a word.

Her mind churned with fury towards the lecherous Cobrastrike who hurt an innocent she-cat, treating her like she was a maggot-infested wren in the prey pile and deflowering her, taking away all her purity and innocence.

"*Cobrastrike, step forward*." The dusky brown tom stepped forward nervously, and the rest of BlazeClan moved away from him.

As horrible as the BlazeClan toms might be, they all knew it was against the code to do what Cobrastrike had done to a Starpaw, and they never bothered to even try attempting it.

The worst they did was flirt, and that was it. Knowing that one of their mighty fellow Claws had did it with an underage cat was shocking and horrible.

"*You have forced yourself into a Starpaw and broke the rules of the Blazing Star's code. As a she-cat herself, Lichenfrost will decide your punishment,*" Cougarstar growled, and his daughter stepped up.

Goslingpaw had never seen Lichentfrost so mad before. Her fur bristled, her hackles were raised and her tail was lashing to and fro.

She glared at Cobrastrike before abruptly leaping down and slashing at his face with her claws. The brown tom shrieked and jumped back.

"*From this day on, Cobrastrike will be the lowest ranking Claw in BlazeClan. Gustfang can take his place as General Thornslash's Second-In-Command*."

Slatepaw and Stonepaw' eyes widened, and Goslingpaw saw Lionpaw and Cootpaw congratulate Rockpaw. Goslingpaw couldn't help but feel proud, Gustfang was their father after all.

"*What?! You can't do this! All I did was try to mate with a Starpaw, and you're demoting me to near Prickle status?!*" Cobrastrike shrieked.

Gasps echoed out throughout the clan, and Goslingpaw saw Swanpaw's eyes widen. "*Shut up!"* Spat Lichenthorn. *"One more word from you and I'll get Cougarstar to flay you alive!*"

Cobrastrike was about to open her mouth to complain again, when Cougarstar finally bellowed, "*ENOUGH! I will not change the decision made! Any more complaints and you will be executed!"*

Multiple Claws gave Cobrastrike dirty looks, and the she-cats blatantly ignored him. "*Wonder how he's ever going to find a mate now,"* sniggered Stonepaw.

Goslingpaw rolled her shining eyes in amusement and meowed, "*You two better get out now. The Nettles won't be pleased to see you in here*."

The grey furred brothers seemed pretty disappointed, but they still said their goodbyes before hurrying out of the Nettlecave.

As the Nettles headed into the small cave like water trickling from a crevice, Goslingpaw heaved herself to her paws and took her place beside Softpaw, who squirmed slightly in her sleep and tucked her head between her paws.

She was faintly aware of quick pawsteps approaching her, and glanced up to see Depthpaw. "*What?*" She sighed exasperatedly.

"*U-um, I just wanted to say hi*," He mewed awkwardly. Goslingpaw rolled her eyes again and turned back to Softpaw. Why had the Nettles let him in?

Right, he was the BlazeClan General's son, of course he could do whatever he wanted.

He nervously fidgeted around, before asking, "*How's Softpaw?" "Not okay*." Goslingpaw felt her insides twist further with pity for the unfortunate Starpaw.

She was going to carry the burden of this incident for life. "*Oh... it's*

a pity that happened to her, I'm sure she'll get better and join your sister soon," Depthpaw mewed reassuringly.

The Littlepaw felt her hackles raise. "*Do you know how INSENSITIVE you sound? You think all mental trauma can be healed with a flick of a rabbit's tail?*" She snapped.

The russet Titanpaw stumbled back, shocked. "*C-can't they? Dad says-" "I don't care what your dad says! Don't come and ask stupid questions again!"* Goslingpaw barked, and pointedly turned her back on him.

"*And don't you dare mention that she-cat to my face. She is not my sister, just like how Dovetail is not my mother,"* she added with a hiss.

She heard Depthpaw make a noise of dismay, then his pawsteps fading away as he left the den. She sighed and looked back at Softpaw, who seemed to be in peace as she slept.

Life just got more interesting, it seemed.

Chapter 15: Old Memories

"What's the matter with you?"

Goslingpaw snapped out of her trance when Chervilsky suddenly poked her shoulder with a claw. "*H-huh?" "Are you trying to grow another forest in our nests or something?*" She replied sarcastically.

Goslingpaw's eyes went wide and she looked down to see that her paws were surrounded with curling tendrils with leaves growing on them.

Many similar ones had sprouted all over the den too, and, much to her dismay, were sprouting on the walls as well.

During the past moon that dragged by, her plant-manipulating powers seemed to be growing stronger and stronger still. And they showed no signs of slowing down.

She yelped and quickly withdrew her paws, and the plants stopped growing immediately.

"*I'm so sorry, I-I don't know why my powers are doing this-!"* Cloudflower quickly treaded over and rested her tail on the Littlepaw's back.

"And nobody's blaming you," she added gently with her soft, soothing voice.

Murmurs of agreement and sympathy echoed from the other Prickles, except for Hazepaw, who stared at her, facial expression contorted into one of thought.

"Come to think of it, I think I may know why you have those powers to begin with," he suddenly mewed.

Five pairs of eyes turned to stare at him, and he pulled himself up into a comfortable sitting position and arched his tail back.

"*Back before my mentor was exiled, I met his mate and she'd told me about a tribe of mystical winged cats with powers like no other."*

"They could bend water and fire, turn the calmest winds into shrieking gales, raise their voices to sonic volumes and sing a cat to death, send plants and rocks shooting through the ground and charm snakes into doing their bidding."

Goslingpaw's jaw dropped. "*You're kidding!*" The former Titanpaw shook his head.

"*Am not. The DenFolk pet, she said her name was Morning Glory, could manipulate fire. She could twist beautiful flames from her paws, and embers and sparks would dance across her pelt at night when it was too dark to see. They were like fireflies, those sparks!*"

His gaze flickered with those long-ago memories like minnows in a pool of starshine. "*Woah...*" Goslingpaw couldn't help but marvel at his words.

"*Morning Glory also mentioned that cats with those powers would have symbols on their shoulders that represented their element. Those sigils that appeared on your shoulders represent your ability to manipulate plants and your ability to raise your voice to the heavens,"* Hazepaw mewed.

Goslingpaw blinked as she turned her head and glanced down at the weird shapes that appeared on her shoulders.

"*But... Dovetail doesn't have any element like that*," Goslingpaw mewed in confusion. "*Shouldn't Swanpaw also have something similar?*"

Hazepaw shrugged. "*Don't know. Apparently your dad was Morning Glory's stepbrother, that's how you got those elements*," he answered nonchalantly. Goslingpaw's eyes went wide. "*So... dad had powers..?"*

"*He probably did, but he never showed it. I did wonder why Blazeclaw wore some DenFolk collar thing over his eyes and back though, his elements were probably why,*" yawned Hazepaw.

"It always seemed weird to me that he had plants growing in his nest all the time and that he would also adorn his pelt with ferns and leaves if

given the chance. I'm going to go out on a limb and take a wild guess that he grew them there himself."

Hazepaw paused, then chuckled. "*Crowcall even said he had the voice of a lion; I overheard that he scared off a badger by letting out the loudest caterwaul in the forest."*

The Littlepaw smiled, but then got up to her paws immediately, and asked the next biggest question on her mind. "*Did... did Dovetail ever know about the powers dad had?*"

This time, Poppystreak answered her instead. "*Apparently not, because if she did she'd be treating you like how she treats your spoiled sister and Swanpaw like a maggot-infested wren. When Blazeclaw died she was so upset she only curled herself around Swanpaw and kicked you out the nursery.*"

Goslingpaw felt her heart breaking again. "*Surely... surely she wasn't that bad?*" She tried to reason, even though she knew it wasn't true in the slightest.

"*She was. The day after Blazeclaw died she publicly announced that Swanpaw was her only daughter because you, and I quote, cursed him and caused him to die since he'd last been with you before he passed,"* Poppystreak replied, shaking her head sadly.

"*You were only one and a half moons old, yet she told Swanpaw to stay away from you because you were a curse and an eyesore and wouldn't raise you at all,"* Rabbithum sighed remorsefully.

Goslingpaw felt like frigid talons were shredding her heart apart. "*She...she did?"*

Chervilsky nodded. "*She refused to let you nurse at her belly. When you tried she'd kick you away and tell you to get lost because there wouldn't be enough milk for Swanpaw. The only reason you're still alive and kicking wasn't just because of Azuregale, but because one of the Nettles nursed you instead."*

Goslingpaw stopped. A Nettle... had nursed her? Not a Shine?

"*Who nursed me?*" She asked, staring in astonishment at the former

Nettle.

Chervilsky thought for a moment. "*I think her name was Aldertrail. She immediately said she'd nurse you if no cat would and one of the Shines, Chanterellestreak, agreed to help her if Aldertrail's milk didn't flow."*

It felt like someone had splashed ice-cold water on her face.

Aldertrail had nursed her.

Her own mentor.

"Aldertrail nursed me?" "She did. She was the only one who argued to nurse you. Azuregale never told Cougarstar about it because he has at least SOME decency, and Chanterellestreak covered up for Aldertrail by pretending to nurse you when the leaders were around. A good actor she was, too," Cloudflower meowed.

Goslingpaw stared at the Prickles in shock, her paws feeling like they were frozen to the ground.

"*W-what else happened when I was a kit?*"

Rabbithum flicked an ear and answered, "*Aldertrail also argued with the Leader to mentor you when your future in the tribe was being discussed and Cougarstar decided you'd be a Nettle. There's a rumour that she wanted kits but could never bear them so she wanted to try raising you instead to become a strong and confident Nettle.*"

Goslingpaw gasped.

Now she understood why Aldertrail had cared for her whereas the other healers only said a word or two to her or never interacted with her at all.

Aldertrail loved her like she was her own daughter. Quickly excusing herself and saying goodbye to the Prickles, she ran back to the Nettlecave to search for one cat.

"*Aldertrail?"*

Chapter 16: Hidden Truth

"*Aldertrail?"*

Her beautiful brown-furred mentor turned around, pale eyes shimmering as she gazed at her apprentice. Leaves were tangled in her pelt, and a set of nettle leaves were tucked neatly behind her ear.

Petals and small flowers were strung between the feathers in her wings too. She flicked her wispy tail, sending smaller leaves and petals floating across the air, and asked, "*What is it?"*

Goslingpaw couldn't contain herself anymore and, somehow managing to keep her voice down, burst out, "*Did you nurse me when I was a kit?"*

This question stunned her mentor. Aldertrail just stared at her in shock, green eyes wide, jaw slightly agape and her paw hanging in the air.

When she finally composed herself, Aldertrail whispered in fright, "*H-How did you know? I never told you!"*

"*The Prickles told me you nursed me because Dovetail wouldn't,*" Goslingpaw admitted softly, looking down and awkwardly tracing circles on the ground with her paw.

Aldertrail paused, and glanced around nervously before beckoning her to the back of the Nettlecave.

Once they were completely shrouded in the darkness, with only faint sunlight peeking through, Aldertrail turned to her once again.

"*Which Prickle told you that I nursed you?"* She asked, eyes rounded. "*Chervilsky*." Aldertrail sighed and shook her head, sending leaves fluttering about.

"*Aldertrail, why would you nurse me? I was said to be a curse; why did*

you still choose to nurse me and not say a word to me about it?" Goslingpaw asked, feeling a sense of betrayal.

She was met with a look full of both pain and heartbreak from pale green eyes.

"*Because Azuregale warned me not to say a word of it. He knew you wouldn't take it calmly knowing you were nursed by a lowly Nettle like me. So I kept mum about it, and Chanterellestreak agreed to cover up for me if you ever asked about it,*" Aldertrail replied.

"*But why?*" Goslingpaw asked, feeling impatient. "*Why did you nurse me willingly?"*

Aldertrail drew an agonised breath. "*I didn't want an innocent life to be taken away because of some delusional, rat-brained she-cat who dares to have the audacity to call herself a mother*."

She locked gazes with the Littlepaw, and Goslingpaw felt as though there was something else that her mentor was hiding.

She was right.

Aldertrail gave a raspy, bitter laugh. "*When I was younger I never even knew what it was like to have a mother raise me. Mine was slain in front of the whole clan for having a three-way affair with the General, the Leader's son and a noble warrior back then when I was only two moons old.*"

The cream and brown she-cat gasped in horror.

"*My father held no interest in me so I grew up alone. When I saw how Dovetail kicked you out of the nursery, I thought back to my childhood without a mother. I didn't want you to suffer the same way as I had.*" Goslingpaw held back a sniffle.

These weren't the words of just some regular mentor who cared deeply for an apprentice; these were the words of a true mother.

Aldertrail gave another pain-filled sigh. "*I wanted so badly to have kits too; I wanted to show them the love I failed to receive as a child. But I am a Nettle, so if I were to be caught with even one kit I'd be dead by*

sunset. So when I volunteered to nurse you, Chanterellestreak, my best friend, agreed to help me should my milk not flow."

Aldertrail blinked. *"The other Nettles thought I was crazy, but I ignored them. Once you got old enough to stop suckling, she told you about your childhood, but I told her to leave out the part where I fed you."*

Aldertrail hung her head miserably, her ears drooping. "*The prophecy already boosted the clan's belief that your horrible sister would save us all; Cougarstar saw you as irrelevant and your mother said he could get rid if you if he wanted because she claimed you were useless."*

She shook her head ruefully. "*If he saw me fostering you, only the Crown Spirits know what would've happened*." The brown she-cat lifted her head up once more.

"*I have made many mistakes in my life, Goslingpaw. But the biggest one was being a coward and never getting the courage to ever tell you how much I saw you as my true daughter.*"

Goslingpaw stared up at her mentor. Compared to her birth mother, Aldertrail genuinely cared for and loved her, always keeping her interests before her own.

Then, she realised what her foster father had meant when he'd spoken to Aldertrail, when he hesitated and never finished his sentence. He wanted to parent Goslingpaw with Aldertrail by his side, like the three of them were genuinely family.

"*Aldertrail... I don't know what to say...*" Her mentor looked away, sadness and guilt pooling in her lovely jade irises. "*But... I always saw you as my mom.*"

The healer turned to stare at her Littlepaw in astonishment, eyes wide. "*I knew about you and Azuregale, I snuck out and saw his confession. But even before that I already thought of you as a better mother than Dovetail ever was*," she mewed, curling her tail around her paws.

"*Goslingpaw*!" Her mentor stared at her in shock. "*No wonder I caught your scent in the bushes!*" She smiled sheepishly and mumbled,

"*Oops?*"

Aldertrail didn't clout her over the head as she usually would've, however, but gazed at her with warm affection in her eyes. "*You really mean what you said?"*

"*I do, mom.*" Aldertrail gasped in delight when the cream and brown apprentice called her that, and Goslingpaw quickly leaned in and rested her head against her mentor's chest.

She felt the brown she-cat rest her head on hers, wrapping her warm paws around her smaller form and coil her wispy tail around her back, and smiled.

"*Are we going to tell Azuregale?*" Goslingpaw asked. "*When we're ready to*," her mentor replied. Goslingpaw couldn't help but crack a smile.

"I love you, mom."
"I love you too, my daughter."
~~~~~~
~~~~~~
The sound of cicadas chirping filled the night sky as Goslingpaw nestled deeper into her nest, breathing in her new foster mother's sweet scent.

Goslingpaw was lulled to sleep by the sounds of the Nettles' breathing, and was soon transported to dreamland.

Or at least she thought she was.

She started treading among the clouds, heart beating faster than chirping crickets as she followed a set of starry pawprints on the ground.

Step by step, she slowly made it to a huge clearing, where the starry grass blades swayed in the breeze. Her eyes landed on something, a figure standing in the distance.

"*Took you long enough, my dearest.*" She flinched at the sudden voice, and to her shock, the figure began moving closer to her.

When the figure was closer, she could make out his features; golden

eyes, eagle wings, tufted ears, a sturdy build and plumed tail, white and brown mackerel tabby fur, silver petal markings beneath his eyes...

Her heart stopped. The tom finally reached her and stood in front of her, his golden gaze warm with love. "*Hello, my daughter." "B-Blazeclaw?*"

The tom chuckled and and touched his nose to hers. "*I prefer the alias Rippling Leaf, Goslingpaw."*

He knows my name, the Littlepaw thought in awe. Rippling Leaf smiled. "*My oldest daughter. I am so proud of you. You've grown so strong and brave*."

Goslingpaw stared up at her birth father for the first time, taking in his features and personality. He was everything she had ever imagined him to be.

His face suddenly contorted into a frown and he sighed. "*I must say, I am rather disappointed on how Dovetail acted after I died. I thought she was better than this."*

Goslingpaw suddenly felt her heart sink. Would Rippling Leaf be mad that she 'replaced' him with her foster parents?

He seemed to have read her mind, because the starry-winged tom chuckled, "*I'm glad that you have such kind adoptive parents, though. They have raised you very well."*

Goslingpaw smiled and mewed, "*Thank you, father*." Then, she paused before asking, "*Are...are you here to tell me something about the prophecy?*"

The tabby tom nodded and replied, "*Yes, in fact." "Why tell me, not Swanpaw? Isn't she the prophecy cat?*" The healer to-be questioned.

She was met with a look of surprise. "*Who said anything about your sister being in the prophecy?*" Her eyes widened. Her suspicions were confirmed.

Swanpaw was not the prophecy cat at all.

"*My dearest hatchling, you must not tell anyone what I am about to tell you,*" Rippling Leaf suddenly mewed, his gaze serious.

"*Not even the Nettles?*" She asked. Her father shook his head.

"This destiny is yours, and yours only to complete. The greatest heroes aren't born or created, Goslingpaw, unlike what BlazeClan thinks. They're shaped into who they are through life experiences."

Goslingpaw nodded at her father's words. "*Come. There is a lot to be discussed, starting with your powers*," he mewed, and Goslingpaw complied.

Father and daughter both walked off into the direction of a small cove, tails twined and pawsteps matching. With that, Goslingpaw knew hat her 'peaceful' life was about to take a complete turn for the better...

Or perhaps for the worst.

Chapter 17: Trust In Me

"*So you see, this is how I pat the bedding down...*"

Goslingpaw glanced sideways at Softpaw to make sure she was watching. Her eyes shimmered with interest as the Littlepaw delicately patted the moss down into the bowl-shaped crevice with her white paws.

It had been two moons since the Starpaw had gotten out of the Nettlecave after the incident, but Chanterellestreak had showed clear disapproval of her apprentice returning to regular Starpaw activities.

She apparently had argued very strongly with Azuregale to get her to stop training as a Starpaw due to her PTSD, even throwing in a couple of unsavoury words into the argument.

Azuregale has been sympathetic, but Cougarstar had not and had instead punished Chanterellestreak for speaking up by demoting her to the lowest ranked Shine and making Softpaw help Goslingpaw with tending to the Prickles.

Goslingpaw was surprised to find that Chanterellestreak had been rather relieved when she was demoted much to Cougarstar's rage and confusion, and frankly she could understand why.

According to Cottonsong, the pregnant Shine she'd spoken to one day when she was delivering herbs to her, Shines who were higher ranked often got more toms after their tails.

Chanterellestreak had never been the type of she-cat who ever wanted to have a mate and kits, let alone ones she couldn't even name herself.

As she watched her Starpaw friend try to mimic her movements in patting down the fresh bedding for the Prickles under their careful watch, she noticed how much the Starpaw had changed in her

actions and behaviour.

Now, Softpaw seemed more on guard for any possible danger and seemed easily startled and frightened. Any tom that approached her would trigger her immediate flight response, and it had taken time for her to get used to Slatepaw and Stonepaw.

She had trouble sleeping, trouble concentrating, and lacked almost all interest in the activities she once enjoyed like taking strolls and sunbathing.

Poor Softpaw had also began to get more detached from her family and friends, straying away from Swanpaw and her gang and having severe difficulty showing any positive emotions whatsoever.

She often shied away from any cat and would have constant nightmares about that horrible incident.

That, and throw in the fact that Slatepaw and Stonepaw's insensitive and arrogant older brother Rockpaw had the absolute audacity to flirt with and 'reserve' Softpaw as his future mate just a moon after her incident was her breaking point.

The cream and brown apprentice's heart was filled with nothing but pure sorrow and worry for the Starpaw.

"*That should do, good job, Softpaw,"* she tried to mew in a n encouraging tone, though given how tired she was she could've sounded anything but. Softpaw glanced at her, and cracked a weak smile.

Chervilsky and Poppystreak mewed their approval as well, and Rabbithum gave a warm smile to the Starpaw.

Cloudflower and Hazepaw were already nestled into their nests, sleeping as they had been guarding the den from any possible Claws who wanted to vent their anger on something.

"*Um... Goslingpaw?" "Hm?"* The amber-eyed she-cat gazed up at the tabby-calico mix, eyes half lidded from exhaustion due to the dreams she'd had last night. "*Why and how are there so many plants growing around the den?"*

The Littlepaw mentally cursed herself. Usually she was a good liar and would willingly lie to get out of any tricky situations, but now it felt like her tongue was fossilised.

She couldn't find the heart to lie to Softpaw, as much as she wanted to.

She glanced outside the den to ensure no cat was nearby, then whispered quietly, "*Don't tell anyone what I'm about to show you."*

Softpaw' eyes widened, and she quickly nodded. Goslingpaw stared at the ground before her, and imagined a rose growing through the ground.

She shut her eyes and scrunched up her muzzle in concentration, feeling something akin to white hot fire behind her eyes. Something tingled at the back of her head, and she felt as though her paws had red-hot coals embedded in them.

Soon, the feelings stopped, and when she opened her eyes again, she was met with a look of absolute shock from the golden eyed she-cat.

Indeed, a white-petalled rose was growing through the cracks in the ground, the flower a beautiful shade of ivory and white and its leaves fresh and dewy. "*Uh... Littlepaw?*"

The two she-cat apprentices looked at Poppystreak, who was staring at the den entrance. "*You have spectators*."

Goslingpaw's eyes widened and she turned to see both Slatepaw and Stonepaw staring at her in astonishment from outside the den.

"*Gos... you have powers?*" Slatepaw gasped in awe, staring at the rose. The two Titanpaws suddenly cantered into the den and started circling her in excitement, and Stonepaw chirped, "*That's so cool!"*

Goslingpaw cracked an awkward smile and said, "*Thanks?"*

The Slate and Stone brothers then turned to Softpaw. "*Softpaw, we're so sorry about our older brother. He's still adamant to make you his future mate no matter what we tell him*," Slatepaw mewed

apologetically.

Softpaw blinked in surprise and quickly told them it was fine, though her facial expression said otherwise.

Goslingpaw noticed both twins had fresh scratches across their sides and limbs that looked like claw marks that had just been treated, and immediately guessed that their mangy older brother had clawed them for trying to change his mind.

Anger flooded through her entire being and she swore to protect Softpaw from that monster of an older brother.

"*Young'uns, if you want to talk to each other, best go to the back*," Rabbithum suddenly mewed in her raspy voice. "*Claws won't be happy to see Titanpaws being nice with a Starpaw and a Littlepaw*."

The four apprentices nodded and quickly headed to the back of the beaten-up den, where they were all completely shrouded in inky darkness.

"*Gos, how did you do that?*" Stonepaw asked, eyes wide with curiosity. "*I-I don't know, I think it has to do with dad because he had similar powers,*" she answered hesitantly.

"*You saw Blazeclaw?*" Slatepaw asked. Goslingpaw debated on whether she should tell her friends about the meeting with her father last night, then decided not to and answered with a simple "*Maybe*."

"*Woah...*" Goslingpaw paused for a minute, then gazed at the three cats around her. "*I can trust you all not to tell any cat about this, right? About my powers, and what I'm about to tell you?*"

Softpaw replied immediately, "*I swear that I won't tell anyone!*" The twin brothers nodded ecstatically, and the Littlepaw nodded.

"*Okay. Basically, I've been... hearing voices singing every day*." The three apprentices stared at her in confusion.

"Gos, isn't that normal? I hear the Shines singing daily," Slatepaw meowed in confusion. "*If you count stupid Swanpaw's horrendous*

screeching singing," muttered Stonepaw under his breath.

"*No, like I hear singing even when there's absolutely no cat that's speaking at all! The voices sound so far away, and it's so hard to decipher what they're singing!"* She protested.

Softpaw glanced at her in surprise. "*But we haven't heard a thing!"*

"*Precisely. Don't you think it's odd?*" Goslingpaw asked. Slatepaw's eyes widened.

"Wait, shouldn't Swanpaw be the one hearing the voices if she's the cat of the prophecy? Hear the songs of glory? She never said anything about that!" "Exactly!" Meowed Goslingpaw.

Softpaw suddenly spoke, *"I found it weird how the Crown Spirits didn't gift Swanpaw any powers that would aid her in fulfilling the prophecy when they usually would have, and yet you're the one with powers."*

Stonepaw's eyes suddenly lit up. "*Gos, you're the prophecy cat!"* Goslingpaw stared at him in surprise. "*Am I really, though?*"

" Don't you see? Your sister keeps bragging that she's the cat of the prophecy, but she doesn't have any powers given to her by the Spirits above! She didn't hear the voices, and I'm positive she hasn't even met a Crown Spirit cat that gave her advice before!"

Goslingpaw thought. Maybe it was possible. Maybe she was the prophecy cat.

But her sister was still more graceful and far more pretty than her, yet she had heard the songs of implied glory, and her sister probably had not.

She knew who her father, who was probably the lost star, was, and she did not.

Maybe... just maybe...

She could be the one to fulfill the prophecy.

Chapter 18: Deep Down Under

"Claw, kick, claw, kick! That's it! Keep going!"

Goslingpaw kicked her legs hard, copying her mentor as she was taught to pick up speed using that particular swimming method.

Her foster mother yelled out words of encouragement to her, and Gustfang, who was sitting by the bank, nodded in approval.

The Littlepaw huffed as she finally managed to make it to the checkpoint, an algae-covered stone in the water, and clambered onto it with some difficulty, her paws slipping and sliding every once in a while.

Aldertrail had deemed it safe for her Littlepaw to start training in deep water, and Gustfang had agreed, seeing how much the cream and brown she-cat had gotten more confident and faster in the water.

That was very true, seeing that Goslingpaw could swim twice as fast as she did when she first started out.

The Littlepaw leapt to the bank as her mentor clambered out, and shook out her fur nearby. "*Oi!*" Sputtered Gustfang as water sprayed all over him, and Goslingpaw immediately squeaked out an apology in fright.

Gustfang huffed out an odd laugh. "*No worries, small one. My sons did this all the time when they played in the rain.*" Goslingpaw gave a smile, although, mentally she was grumbling that she was not that small-sized.

Suddenly, pawsteps started approaching, and Aldertrail almost immediately whisked her foster daughter into her protective embrace.

Gustfang didn't even bristle his fur in the slightest, and Goslingpaw

wondered if he showed love to his sons outwardly before.

Soon, a patrol showed up nearby, and Goslingpaw gritted her teeth in annoyance when she saw Lionpaw, Cootpaw, Rockpaw and Depthpaw there with their mentors.

Those Titanpaws always made fun of her, and Depthpaw was so annoying...

"*Hey, look! It's the fat Littlepaw!*" Shouted Lionpaw, and his cronies burst out laughing. Goslingpaw flattened her ears and turned to her foster mother, but this only prompted jeers from the two others.

Their mentors only nodded along with them, smirking malevolently at the she-cats. Thornslash was also there with his son, and he was also encouraging it by not saying a word to defend them.

"*What's the matter, Stupidpaw? You about to go crying to your mommy?"* Sneered Cootpaw, before his Titanpaw friends burst out laughing. Goslingpaw felt her hackles raise and her fur begin to bristle with anger.

Gustfang glanced at her and quietly hissed, "*You're showing weakness, Littlepaw, by cowering away. They'll never stop taunting you that way*."

Goslingpaw knew he was right. She turned to stare at them, and slowly stood up. "*Goslingpaw, don't*," whispered her mentor in alarm. "*Oh look! Cry-kit is taking her first steps! Let's hope she falls!*" Cackled Rockpaw.

Depthpaw seemed upset as his so-called friends laughed, and he gave Goslingpaw a look of desperation as he twitched his russet ears, as if trying to say he wasn't with them.

Goslingpaw didn't say a word in hopes of possibly psyching them out with a creepy, quiet stare. And it seemed to work.

The toms seemed unnerved by her slit-eyed stare, and Lionpaw tried to 'lighten the mood' by saying, "*Well, look at that creepy bug-eyed stare! Stupid kit doesn't know how to fight, only pathetic enough to take flight!"*

He then proceeded to thump Depthpaw on the back with a hefty paw in a joking manner and said, "*Right, Depthpaw?"*

The russet tom never gave his answer because the thump had been so strong he'd stumbled forward, and the riverbank was so slippery that his paws had slipped out beneath him...

...and caused him to plunge head-first into the river.

"*DEPTHPAW!*" Shrieked Thornslash. The Titanpaws gasped in horror when they realised what they'd done, and the toms all started panicking like a swarm of killer wasps were after them.

Depthpaw was thrashing about wildly, trying to resurface and get to the bank but ultimately failing as his thick glossy fur weighed him down.

Soon, his head vanished underwater completely, and Thornslash let out a yell of horror though he himself didn't dive in to save his own son.

Beside the she-cats, Gustfang had leapt to his paws too, eyes widened in horror. "*Someone do something! My son will drown!*" Shrieked Thornslash, his gaze frenzied and panicked.

On one paw, Goslingpaw didn't mind letting him drown. He was annoying and never knew the concept of 'leave me alone', and she could guess that he'd turn out to be like Thornslash when he was older.

But on the other paw, he was still an apprentice, and she was also a healer. She was SUPPOSED to save lives. If she'd let him drown, she'd be a hypocrite and a disgrace to the Nettles, and she'd probably be executed.

And Aldertrail would be so disappointed in her too...

So without hesitation, she launched herself into the water after taking a deep breath, and shortly after felt another splash and saw her mentor beside her.

The two swam downwards in the direction of the sinking Titanpaw,

using their front paws to propel themselves down further.

Goslingpaw was faster than her mentor due to her small size and developed muscles, so she swam downwards faster than Aldertrail.

Upon reaching Depthpaw, who had completely lost consciousness, Goslingpaw slid underneath his body so she was hoisting him up and paddled upwards to her mentor.

Aldertrail gripped the russet Titanpaw's scruff between her strong white teeth and hauled him up, swimming back up to the surface with powerful kicks and strong slams of her surprisingly powerful back legs.

Goslingpaw followed suit, kicking her hind legs behind her to try keeping up with her stronger mentor and foster mother.

When their heads broke the surface of the water, Goslingpaw hurriedly paddled towards the bank and hoisted herself up onto the ground before leaning down to grab Depthpaw's scruff as Aldertrail swam over.

Struggling slightly, she was grateful when Gustfang gripped her scruff to prevent her from falling into the water as she pulled the Titanpaw up with some difficulty.

When Depthpaw was hauled up to shore, Thornslash immediately darted towards him. Aldertrail clambered up, and with a surprising amount of force pushed him away.

Thornslash glared at her, and tried shoving past her to get to Depthpaw, only to be pushed away again and again.

"*HE'S MY SON, YOU INSENSITIVE HOG!*" Shouted Thornslash in a rage.

Goslingpaw seriously failed to understand how the foolish tom made it to being a General when he wouldn't even let an experienced healer save his own son who nearly drowned.

Aldertrail's patience seemed to have faded at this point, too.

With her hackles raised and fur bristling, she shouted back, "*WELL, YOUR SON WILL DIE IF YOU INSIST ON BEING STUBBORN AND WON'T LET ACTUAL HEALERS WHO KNOW WHAT THEY'RE DOING GET THE WATER OUT HIS LUNGS!*"

Swiftly turning back, she ordered, "*Goslingpaw, work your shoulder under his to pump the water out.*"

Wasting no time, Goslingpaw immediately bent down and worked her shoulder under Depthpaw's, propping him up and down while her mentor picked off strips of bark and dead leaves from his pelt while searching his body for injuries.

Soon, water came gushing out of the russet Titanpaw's mouth like a broken wall, and he let out feeble coughs along with a tiny whimper of pain.

"*Lick his fur the wrong way to dry him and get him warm, Goslingpaw. Quick!*" Aldertrail ordered, and instantly, the cream and brown she-cat obeyed.

Aldertrail hurried over to do the same, and after a moment's hesitation, Gustfang started lapping at his fur too.

After a while, Depthpaw finally came to, his eyes wide and gasping for air. The two healers stepped back and Thornslash raced over and wrapped him into an embrace.

"*My son! Depthpaw, you're alive!*" He gasped. Depthpaw let out a squeak, and choked out, "*Dad, you're choking me!"*

Thornslash quickly stepped back, and gazed fondly at his kit. "*Hey, don't we get any thanks?*" Lionpaw suddenly asked. Goslingpaw and Depthpaw stared at him in utter confusion.

"*We saved you!*" Goslingpaw felt as though some cat had stabbed a stalactite through her chest. The tomcats had done nothing!

"*Yeah! Those she-cats just stood around like sissies while we saved you!*" Cootpaw exclaimed.

Surprisingly, the toms' mentors seemed to be in disbelief that their

apprentices were stealing others' credit, while Aldertrail made no move to stop them, quietly hanging her head.

Goslingpaw twitched her eye in anger and was about to protest when Depthpaw made the reply for her.

"*But... I saw Aldertrail and Goslingpaw dive down to save me before I blacked out... and I heard Aldertrail telling Goslingpaw to pump the water out my lungs...*"

The Titanpaws froze when they realised they had been caught in their lie when Gustfang then further pointed out, "*Your fur isn't even wet, Titanpaws. And how could you have dived down if you couldn't even swim?"*

The Titanpaws stammered incoherently, trying to twist their lie around yet failing. Eyes wide, Depthpaw gazed at the BlazeClan healers.

"*Thank you for saving me,*" He meowed softly as he shakily got to his paws, his russet legs trembling. Aldertrail lifted up her head in surprise, and Goslingpaw stared at him in astonishment.

His father, his fellow Titanpaws and their mentors seemed shocked that he'd thanked two Nettles, of all cats.

Gustfang however, didn't seem as phased as them. "*You have good manners, Depthpaw. Thornslash, you raised him well."*

Thornslash muttered an embarrassed 'thank you' and hurriedly led the patrol and his son away, not daring to look the healers in the eyes.

As they disappeared from view, Gustfang turned to Goslingpaw and gave her one of his rare smiles. "*Well done, small fry*."

Goslingpaw couldn't help but smile.

Chapter 19: Rocky Rumble

Rustles echoed out through the forest as five young cats ran about, plucking herbs from the ground. Goslingpaw paused from her sorting and glanced around her at her friends.

Softpaw and Stonepaw were working together to dig up some burdock root, not caring if their paws and claws got damaged.

Depthpaw was quickly pulling up some yarrow, and Slatepaw had scaled a tree to find more large leaves to bundle the herbs in.

More and more RoadWalker monsters had come closer and closer to camp, driving more and more prey away and nearly killing any cat that went out on patrol or a hunt.

Herbs had also been either destroyed or completely ripped up, and the great trees that once shaped the clan's landscape had been cut down and reduced to stumps.

A discussion had taken place, and Cougarstar said that BlazeClan may have to evacuate if they came any closer to camp.

This had caused a huge riot in camp, especially because the expecting queen, Cottonsong, was estimated she'd give birth sometime this moon, and leaving now would pose a great danger to her unborn kits.

Now, she and her four friends were out gathering all the herbs they could find that weren't already squashed or torn up.

Softpaw had immediately volunteered to go, and Depthpaw had insisted to show his gratitude, much to Thornslash's dismay.

Beechwhisker had surprisingly allowed Slatepaw to go and help out, while Stormslash was a bit more hesitant.

Being completely honest, Goslingpaw would've rather used her powers to grow herbs and bring them back since the Granite

brothers and Softpaw had already witnessed it, but decided against it because she didn't completely trust Depthpaw yet.

Not to mention, she was pretty sure he wouldn't keep his big mouth shut and end up spewing out her secret to who knows which cat, which she *did NOT need.*

Goslingpaw quickly knotted up the third large leaf full of herbs and yelled, "*Slatepaw! Any luck?*" Her Titanpaw friend leapt off the tree, two big leaves in his jaws along with a sturdy stick.

He cantered over and dropped them at her paws, and she turned to him and asked, "*Why the stick?"*

"*Don't pregnant queens bite down on sticks when they're giving birth? I saw Dovetail do it when she was kitting before*." He shuddered. "*Still comes to me in my nightmares*."

Goslingpaw snorted with laughter and took both the herb bundles and looped them around the stick.

"*We got the burdock!*" The two apprentices turned to see Softpaw and Stonepaw running over with big clumps of the root in their jaws.

They dropped it on the leaf spread out before Goslingpaw, and she sniffed it to make sure it was the correct root. "*These things soothe rat bites, right?*" Stonepaw asked as he watched his best friend bundle up the roots into a huge leaf.

"*Yep. You shook off all the dirt from them, I'm hoping?*" Softpaw shook off bits of bark from her pelt and replied, "*We did, the river's too far from here and no cat wants to eat dirt*."

Goslingpaw nodded and finished wrapping up the bundle just as Depthpaw raced over with a bunch of yarrow in his jaws.

"*I got the yarrow, I dug up the right flowers, I hope?*" He panted as he dropped the stalks onto the leaf she had pushed towards him by her paws.

Goslingpaw leaned over and sniffed the blooms carefully, before nodding in confirmation. Quickly bundling them up in the last leaf

and looping it around the stick, she gazed up at her friends.

"*Do you think we'll actually have to evacuate camp?"* Softpaw finally asked quietly. Goslingpaw didn't know what to say as an answer.

"*I hope not. Maybe whatever those stupid RoadWalkers are planning will fail and they'll give up*," Slatepaw sighed wishfully, puffing his dark grey fur up and settling down again.

"*I really wanna explore the world, though! Imagine if we get to meet new cats, have really exciting adventures! Wouldn't that be great?*" Stonepaw objected, his tail waving around in excitement.

Goslingpaw found herself nodding in agreement with the youngest Granite brother. She did want to see what was beyond the clan's boring forest and beyond.

"*Yeah, it beats seeing the same old things over and over again here in the forest*," Depthpaw agreed.

" I'm dying to go somewhere else and explore without dad all up in my face preaching about my safety or breathing down my neck! Seriously, I can't even go to the Dirt-Hole without him assigning some cat to guard me!"

Goslingpaw twitched her whiskers and gazed at Depthpaw with pity. She had done a double take on the General's only son, and had come to learn that his life wasn't all privileges and royal treatment.

The poor russet apprentice struggled to fit in with his other fellow Titanpaws because he wasn't strong, brave or as absolutely rude towards most she-cats as they were.

He hadn't even had the courage to speak to Slatepaw and Stonepaw, mainly since they never seemed that eager to talk to him because they had Softpaw and Goslingpaw.

With a twinge in her gut, the Littlepaw remembered the look of absolute defeat on his face when she saw him overhearing Lionpaw, Cootpaw and Rockpaw mock him behind his back.

He never seemed particularly interested in any of the Starpaws and

always stayed as far away from them as possible, and throw in an overprotective father who jumped into conclusions way too easily, a mentor who only cared about getting a she-cat to bear his kits and the high expectations burdening him by the royals, Goslingpaw could say he was clearly not alright even if he said he was.

She felt a slight wave of guilt as she recalled his feeble attempts to befriend her and she'd just snapped at him to go away like he was a pesky mosquito, assuming he wanted to humiliate her like the other Titanpaws that weren't the two younger Granite brothers and the Starpaws.

She snapped back to reality as a sudden cranking noise was heard. The noise screamed, creaking and monstrous, and soon became louder and louder.

The stench of smoke and burning dirt filled her nostrils, and the Littlepaw forced back the urge to gag.

Suddenly, the voices started singing again. They were louder, and seemed to be warning her about something. Their tones were more frantic and slightly higher in pitch, and she could detect the voices singing for her to run.

Her friends didn't hear the singing, but they obviously seemed to have heard the monstrous cranking noise.

The very minute they turned towards the direction of the voice, a gigantic monster cane into view. And oh, the horrors.

The quaking metal beast had roaring lights for eyes that could blind a cat, and a tremendously long neck that extended to the sky.

It's abdomen was shaped like a RoadWalker den, and from the top of its neck a giant, round rock attached by a string swung about wildly.

The monster let out another tremendous roar, and the five apprentices screamed in horror and immediately fled towards camp with their hearts seemingly frozen out of fear, their paws hitting the path they took with heightened speed.

Goslingpaw had the stick with the herb bundles clasped between her teeth, and much to her dismay, the bundles were becoming undone.

"*The herbs!*" Shrieked Depthpaw as they started to fall to the ground, bundles unraveling one by one and herbs drifting to the muddy ground.

"*Leave them!*" Stonepaw shouted back, not turning to look at the BlazeClan General's son as he ran.

"*But we spent so much time collecting them!"* Depthpaw protested, and from the corner of her eye Goslingpaw could tell he was about to run back and pick them up again to salvage.

She couldn't yell at him to stop and just run for his life due to the stick in her mouth that could come in handy, so she was glad that Slatepaw took the words right out of her jaws as he managed to slam a hefty paw against his head.

"*Just leave them, you blasted fool! Your life is way more valuable than a couple of stupid herbs that can easily be collected again!*" Slatepaw screamed back at him. "*Those herbs are all muddy and damaged now either way, so they're about as useful as a maggot-infested finch by now!*"

Goslingpaw mentally sighed in relief as Depthpaw finally gave in and ran along with them instead of turning back.

The metallic roaring only seemed to get louder and louder, and Goslingpaw felt a pang of relief when she saw the camp entrance.

When she and her friends burst in, all eyes immediately turned to stare at them. "*Goslingpaw? Where are the herbs? Why were all of you running?*" Aldertrail asked as she quickly hurried up to the five apprentices.

Goslingpaw dropped the stick and gasped profusely to catch her breath. She wanted to answer her foster mother, but Depthpaw did it for her instead. "*The... the RoadWalker monster is.... is coming..!*" He gasped, eyes wide with shock.

"*What was that?*" Demanded Cougarstar. "*THE ROADWALKER MONSTER IS COMING TOWARDS BLAZECLAN!"* Depthpaw screamed.

Time seemed to slow down as every cat burst into action. The Claws leapt up immediately, tails lashing with fright. The Shines started panicking in sheer terror, running around and screeching like panicked pheasants.

The Nettles started gathering all the remaining herbs they could get. Thornslash, Gustfang and Azuregale yelled out commands as the Titanpaws and Starpaws began running around and panicking as well.

The Prickles even came out of their den and went straight to the Nursery to help a terrified Cottonsong.

And then the monster crashed through the trees guarding BlazeClan camp, and swung its head into the Great Sunrock, shattering it to pieces that scattered across the ground like dust.

Chapter 20: Bitter Goodbye

TW: Blood and character death.

Screaming.

That was all Goslingpaw heard as the monster shattered the Sunrock to bits.

Cougarstar and his children had already jumped down from the rock in time, and they were already making a run for the exit to camp not blocked by other oncoming beasts.

Amidst the chaos and confusion, Goslingpaw caught sight of Stormslash, Cottonsong's mate, had already fled out of camp, not even sparing her a single glance or even offering to help guide her out of camp.

She also spotted Thornslash grab his son by the scruff of his neck and run out of camp with him.

Most of the Claws and Titanpaws had also started to run out of camp as well, and Goslingpaw felt her heart wrench when Dovetail only whisked up Swanpaw and ran, not even sparing her a single glance.

Rabbithum, Cloudflower, Poppystreak and Chervilsky were also hurrying Cottonsong out of the camp, sweeping her along like fishes in a pool of water.

Both the Shines and Starpaws, confused and terrified, just broke into a run for the nearest exit, no matter where it was at this rate.

"*Typical toms*," she thought bitterly as she rushed towards the Nettlecave to try and help the Nettles gather up the remaining herbs that were there. "*Always thinking of saving their tails first.*"

She hurriedly grabbed a bunch of catmint leaves from the nearest shelf just as the back of the cave started to collapse.

"*Go! OUT!*" Shrieked Elmriver as the burly she-cat shoved Goslingpaw out of the Nettlecave, bolting our afterwards with a stick in her jaws.

Most of the Nettles has fled from the camp with the herbs already, and Willowflutter and Stempetal had surprisingly managed to enlist the help of Beechwhisker and Gustfang too.

Aldertrail bolted over to the frightened Littlepaw's side, and stared at her as though she hadn't seen the cream and brown apprentice in moons. "*My darling!"* She gasped. "*You're alive!*"

Goslingpaw pressed her head against her foster mother's, then quickly pulled away.

Aldertrail immediately curled her tail protectively around the smaller she-cat's back, and led her in the direction where most of BlazeClan had fled.

Goslingpaw felt a breeze as Gustfang blazed past her, the two younger Granite brothers in tow.

Rockpaw had already fled ahead of them, and the Granite triplets' mother, Starlingspirit, was herding her sons from the rear, lashing her glossy tail at them and yelling at them to run.

The twins shot frightened glances at Goslingpaw as they ran past her, before looking back ahead as Gustfang hurriedly brought them out of the danger zone in time.

The moment they passed her, Goslingpaw then saw Chanterellestreak running towards the exit from the other side, Softpaw clinging on to her back like a tree frog to a tree trunk.

The Starpaw seemed to be beyond terrified out of her wits as Chanterellestreak ran out of camp at the speed of light.

As she and her mother ran for their lives, Goslingpaw dared to sneak a peek behind her. The destruction brought to camp was beyond horrible.

The very camp that had been built up generation to generation was

reduced to nothing but rubble.

The Sunrock and the Nettlecave were nothing but piles of stone and dust, and the nests had been destroyed to pieces by the heavy machinery.

The Prickles' den was already destroyed beyond repair, and the shelters built from tree branches and leaves were broken, scattered across the ground like shedded fur.

Goslingpaw didn't even realise she'd stopped in her tracks to stare at the destruction until she heard a frightened scream.
"*GOSLINGPAW!*"

She whirled around to see Aldertrail looking at her in horror, before she then heard another thunderous creaking sound coming from above.

When she glanced up, she was met with the horrible sight of a gigantic tree falling towards her at rocket speed. She wanted to run; to flee to her mother's side and stay there until she woke up from the nightmare.

But she was frozen in place out of shock and couldn't move.

Her life flashed before her gaze as the tree got closer and closer, until a pair of paws shoved her away in the nick of time. She yelped at the sudden push, and toppled to the ground.

Aldertrail hurriedly raced up to Goslingpaw, eyes wide as she started asking whether her apprentice and foster daughter was okay in a fit of panic.

Before Goslingpaw could answer, an almighty crash shook the earth and a piercing wail was let out and abruptly cut off.

Goslingpaw felt something splatter across her pelt, and was horrified when she discovered what it was.

Blood.

Turning to see who had pushed her away, she felt like her heart had

stopped beating completely.

Hazepaw lay under the fallen tree, his blood soaking the ground beneath him as his eyes glazed over with agony.

His entire lower body was crushed, with his rib cage clearly broken and bloodstained tufts of fur drifting about as blood trickled steadily from his gasping mouth as he tried to gulp for air.

His pale brown fur was stained completely with dark russet blood, and his paws reached out like gnarled tree branches waiting to snare an unsuspecting squirrel.

"*H...hurts... blood...*" Hazepaw choked out, and Goslingpaw let out a horrified cry.

Blood spurted from his mouth as he tried to talk once more, and Goslingpaw broke free from her mother's embrace and rushed to her dying friend.

"*HAZEPAW!*" She cried in horror, and started scrabbling at the dirt to try and free the ex-Titanpaw, ignoring the sickening stench of blood that made her head spin until a bloodied paw was placed over her own.

"*S..stop it, Gosling...paw... Even if you dig me out... I'll still... die... lost so much... blood...*"

"Don't say that!" Wailed Goslingpaw as she turned to stare into Hazepaw's green optics, watching with sorrow and horror as the light started to fade from them gradually.

"*Just go, Goslingpaw... Leave me... Save BlazeClan, I... beg of you...*" He finally gasped for air one last time, before the light went out of his eyes and they glazed over with death.

His body fell limp, and he never moved again. Goslingpaw let out a howl of sorrow for the death of Hazepaw, and her foster mother hurried over to her again.

"*My baby gosling... we have to leave...*" she whispered softly, her voice like a gentle breeze caressing her face. "*B-But... Hazepaw...*"

Goslingpaw couldn't finish her sentence before she broke out into sobs.

"*Goslingpaw, he took the fall for you so you could finish the journey with us*." Her mentor's expression was twisted into one of agony and sorrow.

She knew how close her apprentice had been with the Prickle. "*He will always be with you and he will always be watching over you front the Stars. I promise*."

Goslingpaw bit back another sob. She wanted to stay here, to grieve for her deceased friend. But she would die here; the metal beast was still wrecking havoc upon BlazeClan's camp.

Hazepaw would've died for nothing if she was caught by the RoadWalkers or killed by their beast.

With a final glance at her friend's corpse in its final resting place, she turned and ran out of camp with her mentor, sorrow curling in her belly like a slimy python.

"*It is not your time to come to the Stars yet, Goslingpaw. Do not worry about Hazepaw; he is with me now, my daughter,*" she heard Rippling Leaf's voice whisper to her softly.

"*He will never forget you*." Goslingpaw choked back another sob as she remembered Hazepaw's look of content as he died.

She wanted to wake up; to open her eyes and find herself in a whole new world where she was a Starpaw and Hazepaw wasn't a Prickle and where her father was still alive.

But this was the real world for her. A world where she was Goslingpaw, the clan's sole Littlepaw, a loving mentor as her foster mother and the deputy as her foster father.

As she and her mentor found their way to the rest of the clan waiting at the edge of the forest, she knew the next chapter of her life was going to begin.

It was time to head into the mountains.

Epilogue

"When the Season of Bitter Cold is gone,
The graceful bird listens for the melodious songs.
Kin from a star lost to the cold,
The avian of grace must become bold.
She will fly over the mountain peaks,
Avoiding the sharp-taloned eagles and their beaks.
Her, along with her community,
Must stay together to find their home for all eternity."
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A she-cat walked quietly in the peaceful meadows, her glossy fur rippling with each step she took. A crown of small crystals twined together with vines shimmered atop her head, and small flames licked gently at her paws.

Her striking green eyes scanned the vicinity, before heading towards the Golden Lake. The small bells around the tribal queen's ears chimed softly with each step she took, the silver cuffs around her legs reflecting the moonlight.

Her satin-feathered wings settled lightly, their feathers blowing in the breeze. Faint flashes of gold and topaz shimmered along her coverts, sparkling like stars in the sky.

When she reached the lake, she paused for a moment to ponder. Gazing up at the stars as she sat down, the queen murmured softly under her breath, "*My brother, I wonder if this was all my fault?*"

The she-cat thought of when the DenFolk captured her and how she had left with her mate and children shortly before her brother had died. The glossy, sandy-furred she-cat heaved a sigh of longing.

She wished for him to be by her side again; her mate, the King, was often busy with council meetings and managing the tribe. Her son was usually spotting the apprentice training sessions and was often hunting or racing alone with his mate.

Her daughter...

The royal queen's heart ached as she remembered her daughter's previous self. Bubbly, fiery and upbeat with a smile more radiant than triplet suns.

Now she was colder than ice and still wouldn't even look at her in the eyes because of a misunderstanding that had cost her the entire left side of her face. It had happened so long ago; she was a grown adult now.

Yet she still wouldn't forgive her.

"*My brother; our Audios have been singing for days to try and bring your kin back home. There is still no sign of her. I wonder, have you spoken to her?*" The she-cat murmured softly. The soft night winds blew through her fur, and she listened to the rustles of the bushes and trees around.

"*You must help guide your daughter home, Ripple. My son cannot have kits because his mate is also a tom, and my daughter refuses to take a mate because of that horrible incident. We need another heir to the throne; the tribe would be in disarray when my children pass,*" she murmured to the sky.

Still no reply.

The queen sighed. "*I hope you've heard me, brother. I hope your kin knows to find the way back home again.*" With that, the she-cat turned and headed back home, while the winds blew gently, whistling their hymns of the night.

And behind her, the astral form of a tom stood, eyes flickering with feelings unknown. "*I hope so too,*" came the soft ghastly whisper, as the astral body slowly faded away into the darkness of the night.

Trivia

• Goslingpaw and Swanpaw's father has both Evergreen and Siren elementals. Somehow, both elements were passed down to only one daughter but not the other.

• Elmriver is scorned by some of the more snobbish Shines for her muscular appearance and her rather rough way of speaking, but they all dare not say it to her face because she's physically capable of murder.

• Elmriver was nearly exiled for attacking a Shine named Chirpsong that she eventually killed for insulting her nonstop. The only reason Squirrelstar (previous Leader) didn't exile/kill/degrade her to a Prickle was because the Shine had been having an affair with four toms at once, but Elmriver is still kept under constant surveillance.

• Depthpaw has a small crush on Goslingpaw.

• Gustfang is proud of all his sons even though he won't say it, but he just wishes Rockpaw would stop treating his brothers like dirt.

• Morning Glory is the Princess and future queen of the Tribe Of The Blooming Valley.

• Aldertrail didn't have any romantic feelings for Azuregale at first but she was afraid of making him angry or upset so she agreed to give him a chance.

• Softpaw has serious self-esteem problems.

• If you think Cougarstar is a terrible leader, blame Squirrelstar, his father. He tortured any she-cat that stood up to him or disobeyed him and resorted to violence when it came to outsiders.

• BlazeClan used to swim to practise underwater fighting in case that scenario happened irl but Cougarstar banned that as he deemed it a waste of time.

• Slatepaw is aro-ace and Stonepaw is aromantic.

• Goslingpaw is pansexual.

• Softpaw is an lesbian aromantic.

• Azuregale genuinely loves Aldertrail, and wants to build a family with her.

• Azuregale's ex-mate was a Shine named Seedlingheart who had sandy fur and green eyes, and his unborn kit was supposed to be a tom. If the kit had been born, Azuregale would've named him Palekit or Wispkit for his silvery sand-coloured fur and blue eyes.

• Seedlingheart and Azuregale never truly loved each other, but respected each other as mutuals and even became friends. Azuregale mourned her when she passed like they had been soulmates.

• Floralstreak started to despise her apprentice Swanpaw for all the attention she gets from the clan, and eventually started comparing her to Goslingpaw in secret, often noting the healer to-be's good qualities her own Starpaw clearly lacked.

• Rockpaw is infatuated with Softpaw, and is willing to do anything for her to be his mate, clearly unaware of her attraction to she-cats. This has been going on for so long that even the other Titanpaws agreed with Goslingpaw that his crush on her is extremely creepy.

• Gustfang has trouble showing genuine love to his sons; he is one to believe being soft makes one weak.

• Lichenthorn and Beetlescar both suffer from serious fears of being ignored so they flaunt themselves to try and get other cats to acknowledge them, but they truly just crave for some cat to share their woes with.

• Beechwhisker is actually kindhearted and genuinely cares for Slatepaw, and often takes him on solo treetop hunts to spend time with him.

• Rockpaw, Slatepaw and Stonepaw are called the Granite brothers.

• Goslingpaw is the older sister.

• Goslingpaw and Swanpaw are known as the Avian Sisters, but most of the clan call them the Beauty and the Useless.

• If Hazepaw was never a Prickle, he would be named Hazemask.

• Originally, I planned for Rabbithum to die and Hazepaw to survive and later become Glacier Storm's mate. The idea was scrapped because I didn't see much potential for him to be her mate anyway.

And now for a big secret.

• Thornslash is gay, and even though he won't admit it he's deeply jealous of Aldertrail for having Azuregale's attention because he'd been childhood friends with the silver-furred deputy and had a crush on him since they both became warriors.

• He's also envious of Aldertrail's fur that's just as, if not softer and healthier than his, her more appealing face and her surprisingly well-built body. He spends all his time grooming himself to try and catch Azuregale's eye while trying to bring Aldertrail down.

• Thornslash only took Petalwhisper to be his mate because he wanted kits. He treated her like she didn't exist and immediately broke up with her after Depthpaw was born, but she wasn't upset because she is bisexual and is in a secret relationship with another Shine. *(cough cough CHANTERELLE-)*

Character Showcase

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Should've posted a while ago but I have serious writers block and art block.
Anyway, these are some of the Heart Of A Fighter characters I made on Picrew!

First up is our beautiful girl Goslingpaw. She likes to imitate Aldertrail and wear leaves on her fur. The white markings under her eyes were supposed to be three petals to symbol her ability to manipulate plants but the picrew I was using didn't have it- She's smart and blessed with an excellent memory, and is best friends with Stonepaw and Slatepaw.

Aldertrail's here, and she's probably the most calm and collected Nettle in the whole of BlazeClan. She actually dreams of raising Goslingpaw as her adoptive daughter due to the neglect the apprentice faced as a child but is currently unable to do so. She's the wisest medicine cat, and many she-cats and sometimes toms come to her for advice. She's also resourceful and carries herbs with her in small paw-woven satchels made of leaves and ferns.

Here's Swanpaw, the all beauty, no brains. She's egotistical and boastful about her beauty, and is always looking for opportunities to make fun of her sister. She's also a huge mama's girl and believes her deceased father prefers her over Goslingpaw, though it is actually quite the opposite. She thinks all the toms would take her side because of the prophecy, and she's constantly trying to take her sister's friends away from her by trying to either seduce them or humiliate her sister.

Azuregale is up next, the deputy of BlazeClan and the foster father of Goslingpaw herself. The clan believes she somehow brainwashed him into taking her side, when in reality he was devastated upon losing his mate and her unborn kits due to an unfair trial where she was accused of cheating, and chose to raise Goslingpaw as the child

he never had. He also has a major crush on Aldertrail and hopes to raise Goslingpaw with her as the Littlepaw's adoptive parents.

Slatepaw is one of Goslingpaw's best friends and is a huge lover of climbing trees. He's a skilled climber and likes treetop leaping, though his skills are scorned by the other Titanpaws. He secretly wishes to learn swimming but he knows it's impossible because of BlazeClan's stupid rules. He is Stonepaw and Rockpaw's brother, and his best friend is Goslingpaw.

Stonepaw is Goslingpaw's other best friend and the youngest of his litter, the oldest being Rockpaw and the middle child being Slatepaw. He likes running along the paths in the forest, and is a skilled tracker. Like Slatepaw, he wishes to learn swimming like Goslingpaw, but they both know it's impossible. He despises his older brother Rockpaw and the Starpaws, as he would rather hang out with his brother and his best friend.

This nasty tom is Rockpaw, Slatepaw and Stonepaw's older brother. He thinks his siblings are weaklings and constantly picks on them, hoping that they'll learn their place and eventually become his personal servants, but the they've grown used to his taunts and physical shoves and scratches, much to his annoyance. He hates Goslingpaw to a degree because he thinks she's the one who caused his brothers to grow weak, but he has a major crush on Softpaw. His closest friends are Lionpaw and Cootpaw, and he's trying to 'befriend' Depthpaw only for popularity.

The almighty jackass himself, Cougarstar. He's big, he's mean, and he thinks his rule would make the clan pure and perfect, if it means that she-cats don't have a right to do anything. He's also superstitious and a great believer in prophecies, so that's why Swanpaw gets VIP treatment from him. His twisted reality of perfection stemmed from the clan's code and the previous leader, only he's made it a million times worse. He's the one leader of BlazeClan who stopped all Titanpaw swimming practices, saying it was a waste of time to learn new material and just exercise the old fashioned way. He's also not afraid to manipulate others to get what he wants.

Goslingpaw and Swanpaw's beauty-obsessed mother, Dovetail. She's

way too determined to become the most beautiful cat in the clan despite so many other she-cats being more beautiful than her. She's also a firm believer in prophecies and pushes all her expectations onto her darling daughter Swanpaw while burdening her other with snide remarks, cruel treatment and neglect. She also is a huge suck-up to Cougarstar and keeps trying to take everyone away from Goslingpaw by either saying that Swanpaw is better or by framing her own daughter. She also has a tendency to side with the more popular daughter.

And finally, this is Depthpaw. Thornslash is his father, who is also the highest-ranking warrior in the clan. Because of this, Depthpaw is considered popular with the other Titanpaws, but deep down he hates the attention they give him because he knows they just want to befriend him due to who his father is. He secretly admires Goslingpaw and desperately wants to be friends with her. He also finds his father annoying and overprotective to a huge degree, and he constantly tries to get away from Thornslash so he wouldn't be kept under his surveillance 24/7.

A/N

Ho-lee CRAP! Thanks so much for 1K reads! Thank you for taking your time to read this book, and special thanks to those who added it to your library! This book reaching 1K was a dream come true to me :)

29/12/22

Ranked 4th in warriorcats? This is a huge achievement! Thank you all so much!

1/31/23